

# THE Christian CENTURY

*Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.*

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## The art of power

AT A WHITE HOUSE DINNER honoring Nobel laureates, President John F. Kennedy said, "This is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone."

Jon Meacham's biography, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*, reminded me again of how remarkable Jefferson was. He had a profound appetite for philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, horticulture and theology. He appreciated fine French wine and believed that individual liberty was the basis of a good society and a just government. His greatest personal flaw and political failure was that he never extended his beliefs about liberty to slavery. He knew the institution was morally evil but declined to argue for abolition or to free his own slaves. Most historians agree that he maintained an intimate relationship with one of them, Sally Hemings, and that she bore several of his children.

He authored the Declaration of Independence, advocated for freedom of religion and embraced a radical notion: that using public funds to support an established church is "spiritual tyranny." It did not speak well of the power of God, he thought, if God needed a human government to prop God up.

After the presidency of George Washington, the jury was still out on what kind of government would prevail in the new nation. Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists preferred a strong central government dominated by men of culture, education and pedigree. They entertained the notion of a monarchy and favored a close relationship with Great Britain.

Jefferson's Republicans wanted nothing to do with monarchy, centralized government or standing armies and navies; they were willing to trust the people to govern themselves. The conflict between the parties was bitter and offers plenty of precedent for the current ideological stalemate in Washington.

Jefferson, who understood the value of compromise, was attacked by a radical fringe that felt he "was no longer Republican enough . . . he had been guided not by dogma but by principled pragmatism." These radicals sound like the ones who excoriated Governor Chris Christie for collaborating with President Obama on disaster relief.

In reading Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* I encountered another politician who understood the acquisition and use of power. But Johnson was also a master at reaching across the aisle in every imaginable way to keep political lines of communication open. Kearns quotes Johnson: "The biggest danger to American stability is the politics of principle, which brings out the masses in irrational fights . . . it is for the sake of . . . stability that I consider myself a consensus man."

Johnson's story is also part tragedy. He believed that there was nothing America could not accomplish, which led him not only to launch the war on poverty, an admirable goal, but also into the troop escalation in Vietnam which ended in disaster.

Both leaders were vastly talented, and both were deeply flawed. Both understood power and the art of compromise. At their best, they knew how to use power in the service of enlightened governance—a capacity that is sorely needed these days.

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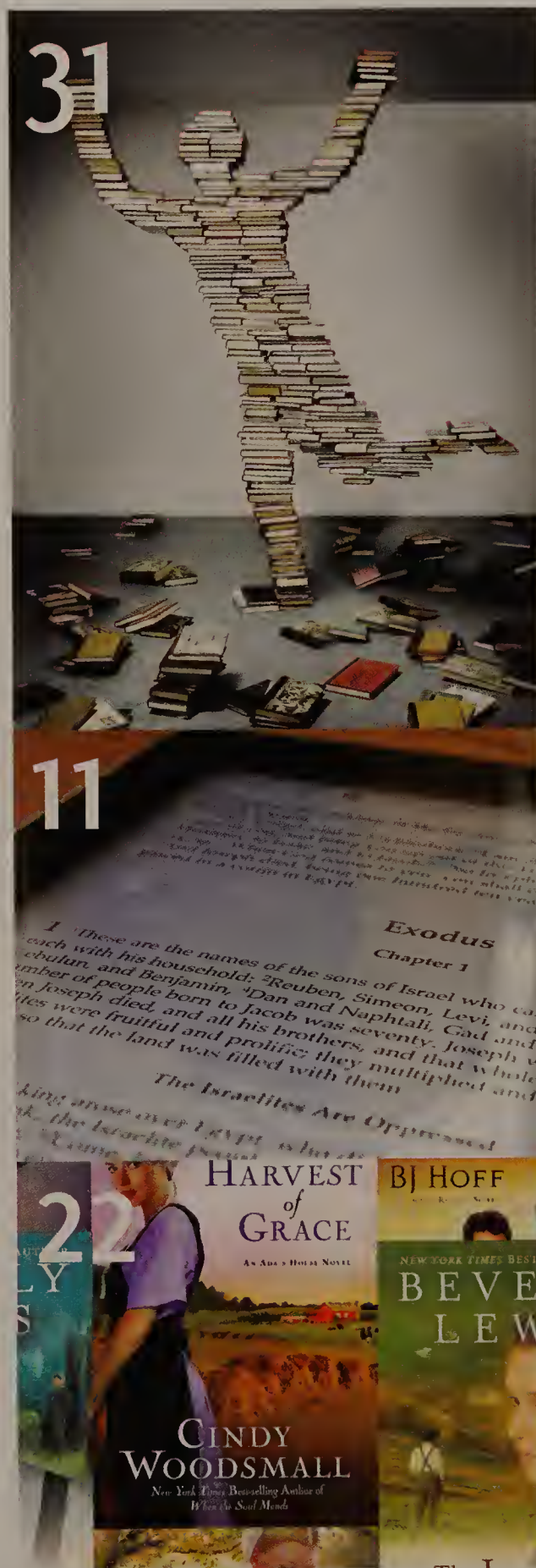
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Ich lebe mein Leben (This life I live)

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## Gay marriage

**A**s one opposed to gay marriage, I find the March 20 editorial, “Blessing gay marriage” disingenuous. You state, “Inside and outside the church, marriage has long been defined as the lifelong commitment of two people to sharing all things in life—children, property, money, joys sorrows, poverty, prosperity. What Christians have added to this general understanding is not an insistence on procreation but rather an insistence that marriage mirrors in some way God’s fidelity to creation and to God’s people.”

Pardon me, but historically the “general understanding” among Christians indisputably has been that marriage takes place between a man and a woman. For the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* to suggest otherwise is a misleading sleight of hand unworthy of this publication. Moreover, it is by no means clear that the current “general understanding” of marriage among Christians includes gay marriage.

*Rocco M. Pugliese  
Woodbury, Conn.*

**W**hile I can agree that the “distinctively Christian understanding of marriage would not be damaged by a legal endorsement of same-sex marriage,” much more needs to be said regarding the distinction between what may be legal and what should or should not be blessed. This is inextricably intertwined with an all-too-often overlooked issue in our contemporary debates over ministerial participation in gay marriage: the separation of church and state.

For all our talk about the separation between church and state, clergy in the United States essentially function as clerks of the state when it comes to marriage. This is especially true in those states that require clergy to obtain a license from the state.

When I was ordained a Lutheran pastor over 25 years ago, one of the first

things I was required to do was to apply for a license to officiate at weddings. I filled out the required form and, together with a photocopy of my certificate of ordination and the appropriate fee, sent it to the office of the secretary of state. In return I received a suitable-for-framing license to “solemnize” marriages in the state of Ohio. It is interesting to note that it is the clergy’s signature on the state-issued marriage license—not her or his signature on a document provided by the clergy’s religious body—that legally marries two people in the eyes of the state.

I, for one, would much prefer the model used in Europe, where a marriage is first a matter of state law. If a couple desires to have their marriage blessed by the religious body of their choice, they may do so.

With the blurring of the separation of church and state comes the confusion between “rights” and “rites.” Let the state define people’s legal right to wed, but let religious bodies define and exercise the rite of marriage that reflects their faith, tradition and practice.

*William A. Hartfelder  
Westerville, Ohio*

### *Long pastorate . . .*

**I** am a very conservative, rural pastor, and I often struggle to find an essay that could unify liberal and conservative Christians. I found an excellent one in Martin Copenhaver’s article “Staying power” (March 20). A pastor’s heart for the congregation is one issue that transcends “liberal” or “conservative.”

I could identify perfectly with his sense of burying the older saints and worrying where the inactive members were drifting. Like Copenhaver, I have seen many children grow up and move away, or better yet, grow up and then bring their own children in.

Copenhaver’s self-confession is my

self-confession: increasing references to myself, more acute vision of the past than the future, worry about whether or not I’ve been around too long. It was a blessing to me to read that my feelings are not unique. Other pastors struggle with them, too, no matter their label—denominational, theological or otherwise.

I receive the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* as part of a pass-along program with other clergy. Normally, my blood pressure rises when I read it. But I greatly appreciated Copenhaver’s insight, wisdom and comforting words.

*Brian Daniels  
Peru, Ind.*

**I** appreciated Copenhaver’s paean to the long-term pastorate and his lovely and comprehensive observations on his experience. He links duration in ministry to the growing and sometimes lovely relationships between a pastor and members of the congregation.

But pastors have families, and pastors may get into situations over which they have little control.

At one of the churches I served, it became clear after three years or so that our children needed new schools and a new culture. I left the congregation—in some ways too soon. In another pastorate I found myself in a place in which no one could have survived for more than my four years because of the nature of the prior pastorate. I was blessed to be able to find a new and meaningful calling with my marriage whole, my family intact, and my spirits not clinically depressed.

I believe good experiences in ministry result from God’s grace and the insights gained through being tested in many settings. Let’s hear it for pastors who make it through, one way or another, by managing to serve parishes with love—however long they can.

*Hugh H. Knapp  
Pittsboro, N.C.*



## Faith-based partnerships

May 1, 2013

**U**nder President Obama, the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships has kept an extremely low profile. Given the excessive enthusiasms of the Bush administration in establishing the office, achieving a low profile has been in many respects an appropriate goal.

The Bush administration heralded the funding of faith-based groups as somehow the solution to the nation's social ills. It imagined that faith groups would provide cheaper and more effective versions of government programs. Captivated by this vision, it vastly overestimated the capacity of religious groups to address systemic social problems, and it took a casual approach to the First Amendment issues that attend government partnerships with religious groups.

Obama's OFBNP has focused on clarifying the rules of such partnerships. It has explained, for example, that religious organizations that receive federal funds are still entitled to choose leaders from their own religious traditions and to express an explicitly religious statement of mission. They are also able to retain religious symbols in their buildings that house government-funded programs. At the same time, the OFBNP has said that government funds cannot be used to support explicitly religious activities such as prayer, worship and proselytizing, and it has stressed that recipients who object to a program's religious character have the right to an alternative provider.

In line with keeping a low profile, the office has carefully sidestepped the most controversial issue dogging faith-based partnerships: Can faith-based groups that receive government funds use religious criteria in hiring staff to run their government-funded programs? During his first presidential campaign, Obama said no—faith-based groups should not be allowed to discriminate in hiring under government contracts. But as president he has avoided the issue. His administration has said the matter can be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

It is time for OFBNP to clarify policy in this field. It is time to state that discrimination in government-funded programs is not allowed. In the words of one of its advisers: "while religious organizations should have full freedom to make religious calls regarding jobs subsidized by tithes and offerings, taxpayers are right to expect to be able to compete for positions created by government grants without regard to their personal religious beliefs or lack thereof."

Those words were written a couple years ago by Melissa Rogers, who in March was named head of the OFBNP. Her appointment is an encouraging sign. Rogers's past work displays her keen sense of how the integrity of religion and state are preserved when the two realms are distinguished.

No religious group is forced to seek or take government funds. Faith groups are free to create and fund missions of their own. But when faith-based groups partner financially with governments, they are partnering with the diverse body politic that funds that government. In that case they should open themselves to a full engagement with the members of that body politic. That means no discrimination.

**The integrity of religion and state are preserved when the two realms are distinguished.**

# CENTURY marks

**RESERVATIONS:** Kimberly Ritter is a professional meeting manager, but before organizing a conference for the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph she had never worried about how hotels are used for sex trafficking. The Sisters insisted on using a hotel that had taken a pledge not to tolerate child sex trafficking. Ritter has since become an activist on the issue. The first step is to make hotels aware of the problem and then to get them to train staff to look for the signs of trafficking (*Chicago Tribune*, April 7).

**FIRST UNIONS:** Cohabitation is preferred over marriage among nearly half of women age 15 to 44, according to a study

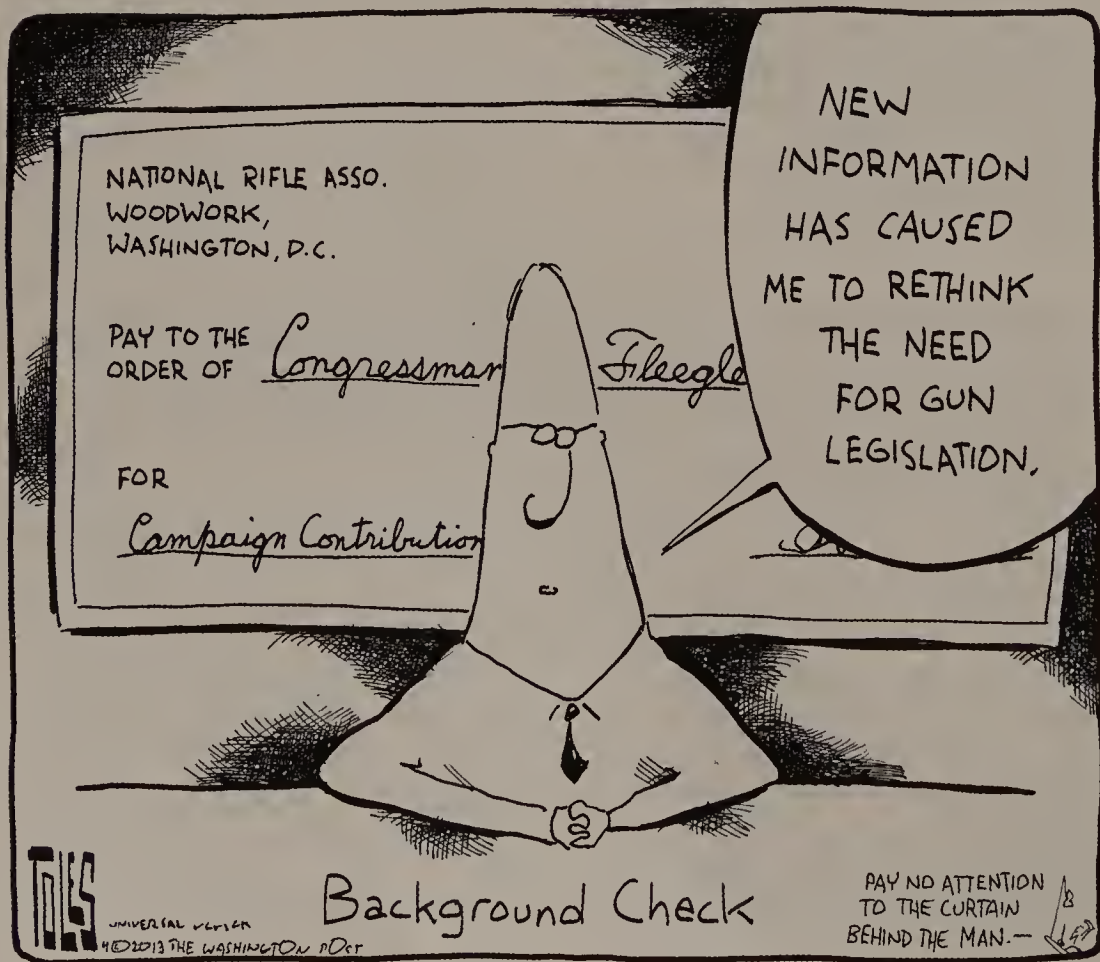
conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics. Marriage is part of a first union for less than one-quarter of women in this age bracket. Unmarried couples are staying together longer and more are having children. Within three years of cohabitation, 40 percent of the women had gotten married, 32 percent still lived with their partner and 27 percent had left the relationship. Those with a college education are less likely to choose cohabitation and more likely to move quickly to marriage (*USA Today*, April 4).

**NATURAL BELIEVERS:** Muslims and Hindus have the notion that children come into the world already knowing God. A growing body of research sug-

gests that children do have an innate propensity to believe that a God or gods exist. Deborah Keleman's research team has shown that children naturally believe that the natural world has a purpose and that someone must have created it. Other research has demonstrated that it is natural for a child to believe there is a deity who watches over them and serves as a moral police to make them behave better (*Big Questions Online*, March 5).

**EVANGELICAL POLITICS:** At least since the 1980s American evangelicalism has increasingly associated itself with conservative, often Republican, politics. Comparing evangelicals in the U.S. with those in Brazil, Erin McAdams and Justin Earl Lance found that evangelicals in Brazil are not as conservative. In response to the statement, "The government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep," 96 percent of Brazilian evangelicals agreed but only 67 percent of Americans did. Brazilian evangelicals are no less theologically orthodox than their American counterparts. One reason for the difference is that no political party in Brazil endorses abortion, which takes that issue off the table. Brazil has a multiparty system and only in 2002 did one party target evangelicals (*Boston Globe*, April 1).

**BEST SELLERS:** Fiction was not highly regarded by Americans in the 19th century. The country, says Randall Fuller, was focused on industry, success and salvation, not artistic achievement. Many were taken by surprise, then, by how Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* drew people into its anti-slavery narrative and moved them emo-





tionally — sometimes to the point of embarrassment. Her novel, which she claimed she didn't write ("God wrote it. I merely did His dictation"), was out-sold in the 19th century only by the Bible (*Humanities*, March/April).

**DESPERATE SITUATION:** Unicef reports that demand for aid to refugees from the Syrian civil war is so high that it is running out of money. By June it will have to stop delivering water every day to the large Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan and will not be able to supply two new camps scheduled to open in the coming weeks. About 385,000 Syrian refugees have streamed into Jordan since the beginning of the civil war, and it's estimated that the number will triple by the end of this year. Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq have also been inundated with refugees and the lack of Unicef funding will also affect them (BBC News, April 5).

**DATING THE SHROUD:** New scientific tests on the Shroud of Turin date the cloth to ancient times, challenging earlier experiments that dated it only to the Middle Ages. The burial shroud purports to show the imprint of the face and body of a bearded man, with nail wounds at the man's wrist and pinpricks around his brow, consistent with the crown of thorns pressed onto Christ before his crucifixion. Many experts have stood by a 1988 carbon-14 dating of scraps of the cloth that dated it to the years 1260 to 1390. In a statement, Pope Francis was careful to refer to the cloth image as an "icon," not a relic, reflecting the Vatican's policy of not claiming the cloth was used to cover Christ after the crucifixion (RNS).

**DEMANDING PROOF:** A California creationist is willing to pay \$10,000 to anyone who can prove in court that God didn't create the world 6,000 years ago. He believes the Genesis account of creation is literally true (*The Week*, April 5).

**GUN VIOLENCE:** A study conducted by the Center for American Progress indicates that states with the weakest gun laws have the highest rates of gun

**“A church that stays in the sacristy too long gets sick.”**

— A saying for which **Pope Francis** was known when he was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio. As cardinal he advocated a missionary church that meets people's needs, both human and spiritual, wherever they are (*National Catholic Reporter*, April 5).

**“Life comes down to who you love and who loves you back—government has no place in the middle.”**

— Senator **Mark Kirk** (R., Ill.), announcing his endorsement of gay marriage. Upon returning to the Senate after recovering from a stroke, he said he had promised himself he'd be more open-minded (*Chicago Tribune*, April 3)

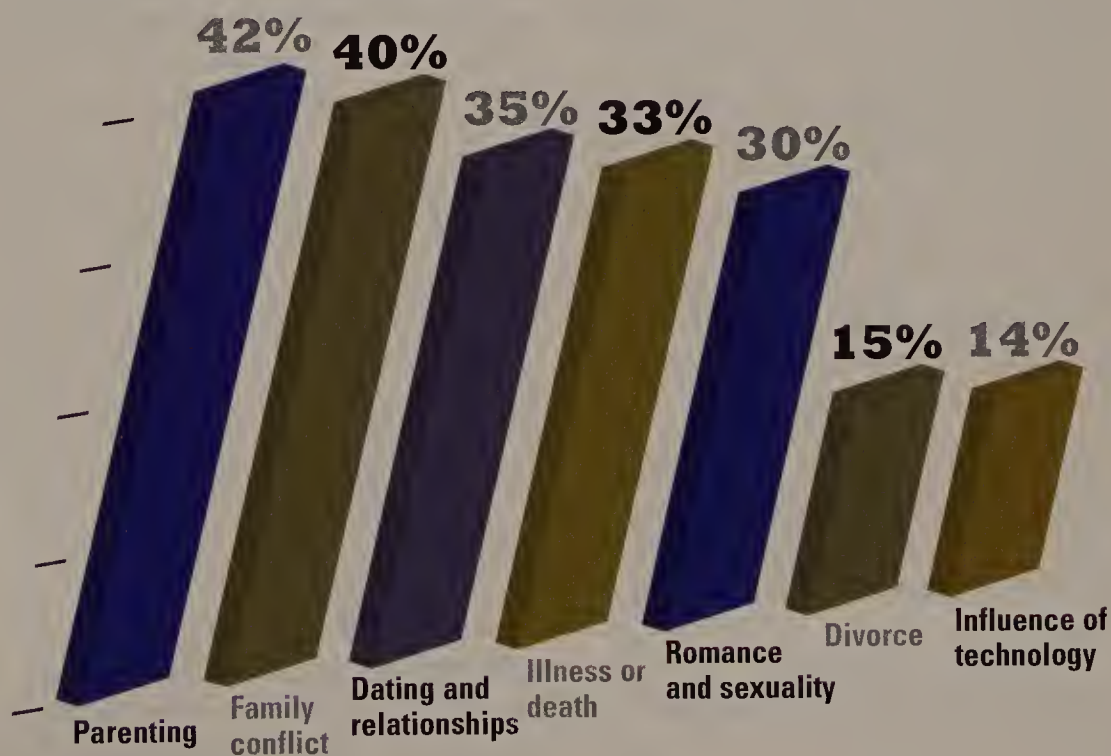
violence. The ten states with the highest rates of gun violence are Louisiana, Alaska, Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, South Carolina, New Mexico, Missouri, Arkansas and Georgia. Eight of these states are among the 25 states with the weakest gun laws. New York, New Jersey, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Connecticut have the lowest levels of gun violence, and they all are among the ten states with the strongest gun laws (Progress Report, April 3).

**PASTORAL CARE:** Megachurch pastor and popular Christian author Rick Warren said he was “overwhelmed” by the love and support offered after the apparent suicide of the youngest of his three children. The Warrens said in an e-mail to church staff Saturday that Matthew Warren had taken his own life in a “momentary wave of despair.” It said he had long struggled to control his emotional pain despite years of prayers and the best available treatment (AP).

## BIBLICAL WISDOM

SOURCE: BARN A GROUP AND AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Percentage of Mosaics (young adults ages 18–28) who are interested in biblical insights on these topics:





One reader to another

# A book's life

by Richard Lischer

THIRTY YEARS AGO I was browsing a secondhand book sale in the basement of the divinity school where I teach. There was a folding table covered with worn-out books, arranged in no order and at giveaway prices. I was drawn to a devotional book by the British author and preacher Leslie Weatherhead, whose books on faith and psychology had achieved enormous popularity in the decades after World War II. The book was called *A Private House of Prayer*, and it had a gold cross embossed on the cracked leather cover. The book is a liberal Protestant's version of Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle*. It is divided into seven rooms of devotion, each signifying a distinctive mode of prayer. It begins with affirming the presence of God in room 1 and ends with meditation in room 7 at the top of the house.

Once I had the book in hand, what caught my eye was the name written inside the cover, that of Jim Cleland, one of my predecessors on our faculty and longtime dean of the university chapel. His sharp wit and Scottish brogue made him one of the most beloved persons ever to serve the university in any capacity. His most famous sermon was "Blessed Are the Debonair." Jim died on the day I interviewed for a faculty position, so we never met. As I looked through the other books on the table, I realized they were all Cleland's books, but *A Private House of Prayer* was the most personal one of all. It seemed to me that such a book had no business on a sale table. So I bought it.

When you buy a used book, it's like joining a conversation in progress. You are learning not only from the author

but from the book's original owner, and the three of you form a small, silent symposium. The used books I order from Amazon for \$.01 plus shipping often come with personal endearments and messages of encouragement written on the title page, as well as sage and not-so-sage comments scrawled in the margins, all of which now belong to me.

Cleland's book was meticulously underlined and annotated. He had obviously used a straight edge and underlined only in red pen. At the end of the

**It seemed to me this book had no business being on a sale table.**

chapter on giving thanks, he had made a list of those for whom he was thankful, including his wife, Alice, other family members, friends and the name of his school. It was an unspoken invitation to add a few names of my own.

When I bought the book, I could not have known that I would lose track of it for 20 years, only to rediscover it just in time to give it to my son to read in his final illness. Who would have guessed that a smart young lawyer would treat an old book of prayers as found treasure and add his own markings in messy pencil?

I could not have predicted how the goodness of this book would skip a generation and bless my son.

He often gave me books, usually inscribed with a personal message from the author that he himself had forged. I gave him books as well, and now they,

have come back to me as my inheritance. They too are covered with his pencil scratchings and notes to himself, which are now notes to me.

There must be a moral in all this: one might caution against trading a tear-stained page for a Kindle or Nook, but these electronic devices can come in handy, especially on airplanes or under the covers. Or one could invoke several sayings on the brevity of life, each one more depressing than the next: *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Or perhaps "Art is long, life is short." That is,

books outlast people. But that isn't true in every case. I've outlasted several of my books.

I choose another lesson, which is the gospel of used books: there is a grace that can work through a book even when the book is out of print, its prose has become an acquired taste, its author is forgotten, and the whole world has moved on to something new. The DNA of the book remains. It passes from hand to hand with the usual signs of age—and love—still intact.

We don't know what a dog-eared Kindle looks like—at least, not yet. But if they can figure out how to make it bend and crack without losing its capacity to touch the human heart, it may one day be as good as a book.

CC

Richard Lischer teaches at Duke Divinity School. His most recent book is *Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son*.



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## The Bible on iPad

# Holy digital

by Richard A. Kauffman

I GREW UP in a tradition in which nearly everyone carried a Bible to church. Sermons were expository, usually providing close readings of texts, and Sunday school classes for adults and children were Bible studies. A friend of mine who grew up in a similar tradition once noted that we didn't defend or explain why we studied the Bible, we just assumed that that's what we were supposed to do as Christians.

The church I now attend is part of the same tradition, but some things have changed. Very few people carry a Bible to church. Sermons, while based on lectionary texts, are rarely close readings of the texts. Very few of the adult education classes concentrate on the Bible. Most Sunday school classes are on topical matters of the Christian life.

Nevertheless, my wife and I continued for years to carry our personal Bibles to church. Call us diehards, if you wish. I think we were making a symbolic statement: we belong to a community of faith that is tied

to a sacred text. Besides, we liked to follow along with scripture readings using Bibles that we were familiar with.

But I stopped carrying a Bible to church about two years ago. I had started using the Bible on my smartphone (turned to airplane mode so the phone wouldn't ring during the service). For a while I still used an annotated New Revised Standard Version Bible for study at home, but then I discontinued that practice as well. My default Bible now is on my iPad. The iPad can hold multiple translations of the Bible; it's easy to use, search and notate; and it's small and light to carry around.

Still, I miss reading and studying a bound copy of the Bible. I miss the tactile sense of engaging a sacred text. One of my study Bibles would naturally fall open to the Sermon on the Mount, a text I've read and studied frequently. I can visualize where certain texts fall on the pages in my old Bible, and I know where my handwritten notes are. As Albrecht

Bengel (1687–1752) said, the good student of the Bible “applies the text wholly to himself and applies himself wholly to the text.” I find that harder to do with an iPad and a digital text than with a printed Bible.

A theologian friend compares bound Bibles to clocks. With a clock you see the sweep of time; with a digital watch you see only the present. A Bible laid out in pages reminds us of the sweeping history of God's engagement with God's people. A digital text hides that sweep from view—you see only the particular text you've opened.

So I'm betwixt and between, a bit like I was when I made the shift from the King James Version to the Revised Standard Version. I had to think about which translation to quote or memorize. I suspect I will live with this tension the rest of my life, torn between my delight in the ease and versatility of a digital Bible and my longing for a tangible book to cherish.

## Ich lebe mein Leben

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,  
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.  
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,  
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,  
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;  
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm  
oder ein großer Gesang.

Rainer Maria Rilke

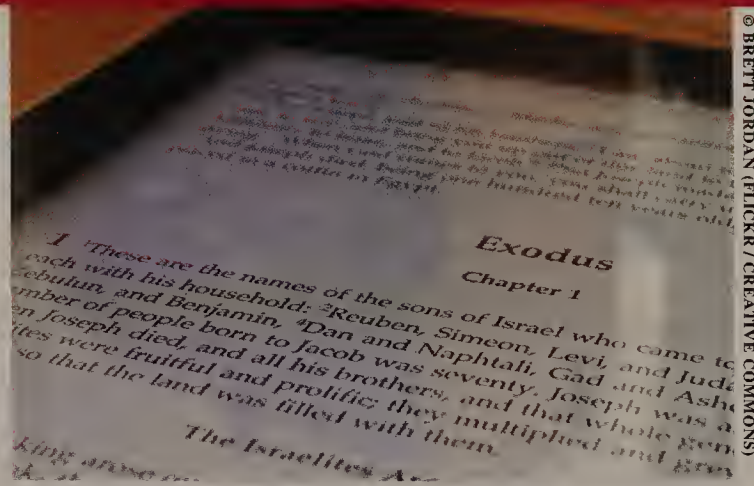
## This life I live

after Rilke, from Book of Hours

This life I live in rings that grow and keep growing,  
drawing things to themselves.  
It's possible I'll never get to the last circle,  
but I mean to see if I can.

I bank around God, around the old tower,  
have circled years in the thousands;  
and still I can't tell: am I falcon, or storm,  
or the swell of some song.

Translation by Steve Lautermilch



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## Tutu's work on forgiveness wins prize

**D**esmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for his battle against apartheid, has won the 2013 Templeton Prize, which is billed as the most significant award in the field of spirituality and religion.

Tutu, who has been unafraid in recent years to criticize leaders in his country and across Africa for humanitarian and political failures, was cited for his work in advancing the cause of peace and the spiritual principles of forgiveness.

"By embracing such universal concepts of the image of God within each person, Desmond Tutu also demonstrates how the innate humanity within each of us is intrinsically tied to the humanity between all peoples," John M. Templeton Jr., a physician and the president and chairman of the John Templeton Foundation, said April 4 in announcing the \$1.7 million award.

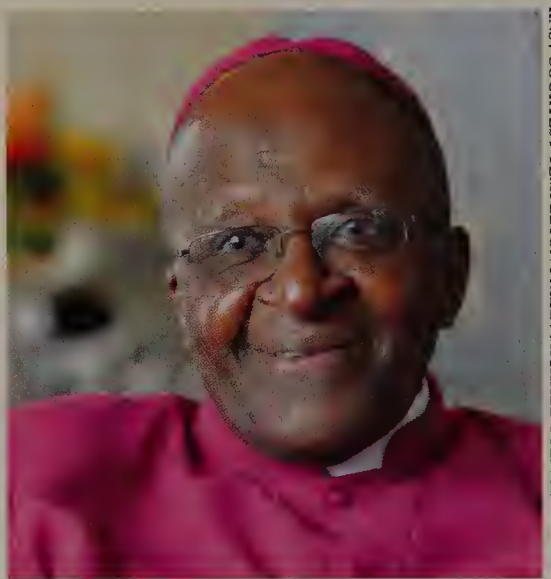
"Desmond Tutu calls upon all of us to recognize that each and every human being is unique in all of history and, in doing so, to embrace our own vast potential to be agents for spiritual progress and positive change. Not only does he teach this idea, he lives it."

Tutu is the second Nobel laureate to win the Templeton Prize in as many years; the 2012 prize was given to the Dalai Lama. The back-to-back wins by high-profile religious leaders signal a shift for the Templeton Prize, which in recent years had gone to little-known physicists and theologians.

Indeed, the prize seems less focused on bridging the divide between religion and science and instead is intended to honor those who have "made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works."

Tutu, 81, said he was "totally bowled over" by winning the prize. "I want to say a very big thank you but I would also like to acknowledge the fact that . . . when you are in a crowd and you stand out from the crowd, it's usually because you are being carried on the shoulders of others," he said in a video statement.

"Therefore if you will let me, I want to acknowledge all the wonderful people who accepted me as their leader at home



**AWARD-WINNER:** Retired Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town, South Africa, won the 2013 Templeton Prize.

and so to accept this prize, as it were, in a representative capacity."

Cape Town's St. George's (Anglican) Cathedral, which became known as "the people's cathedral" when Tutu served as Anglican archbishop from 1986 to 1996, planned its own celebration on April 11. The award will be presented at a May 21 ceremony at the Guildhall in London.

The prize has been the world's largest annual monetary award for the past four decades. Previous high-profile winners include evangelist Billy Graham (1982) and the late Mother Teresa (1973).

In nominating Tutu for the honor, Steven Gish, a professor of history at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama, said Tutu continues a tradition that undergirds the prize, which was initiated four decades ago by the late Sir John Templeton, an investor and philanthropist, to honor living persons who have "made exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension."

"To borrow Sir John Templeton's words, Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a true 'entrepreneur of the spirit,'" Gish said. "With his unfailing faith in 'God's dream,' he embodies the best instincts of us all."

In his remarks, John M. Templeton Jr. said the judges believed that "Tutu's steadfastness to core Christian principles such as love and forgiveness has broken chains of hurt, pain and all too common instincts for revenge, and instead, has advanced the spiritual liberation of people around the world."

Following years of activism against apartheid and national elections in 1994 that elected a black majority government, Tutu headed South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, charged with examining the sins of apartheid and fostering reconciliation between the nation's black and white citizens.

Since then, Tutu has been an outspoken advocate on a host of peace and justice issues, including support for gays and lesbians facing harsh discrimination in the church and across Africa.

"We inhabit a universe . . . where kindness matters, compassion matters, caring matters," he said in his video remarks. "This is a moral universe and right and wrong matter. And mercifully, gloriously, right will prevail." —Chris Herlinger, RNS



## Feeling forgiven helps us forgive others, study says

“FORGIVE US our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Many religious people count on God’s forgiveness, but find it difficult to put aside feelings of bitterness and resentment to pardon others.

A new study, however, shows the two spiritual goals are related. Individuals who believe that a loving God forgives them are far more likely to turn around and absolve others, according to several research projects.

Trust in God’s forgiveness, studies find, also may make it more likely for individuals to forgive themselves, which in turn seems to make it easier for them to extend mercy to others.

Accepting God’s forgiveness and pardoning others is also associated with substantial health benefits. Feeling of anger, fear, shame and guilt over the sins of others and personal transgressions tend to dissipate.

Among the takeaways for religious leaders and people in the pews are that an active faith appears to promote forgiveness. And how human beings perceive God—as a loving father who forgives them unconditionally or as a distant sovereign who judges them—makes a difference in the way they treat friends, coworkers, relatives and neighbors.

“The kind of God we teach about matters,” says researcher Daniel Escher of the University of Notre Dame.

Forgiveness is a deeply personal issue, and no one standard can be applied to individual situations. Many people find forgiving others lifts heavy burdens of anger and resentment from their hearts. But some, such as victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse, find that forgiveness can be offered too quickly or too easily and so is hollow. It could also be potentially harmful if it prevents people from acknowledging their own suffering and makes them less able to distance and protect themselves from transgressors.

In general, however, forgiveness is linked to better mental and physical health. Research has shown people who

scored high on forgiveness scales had significantly lower levels of blood pressure, anxiety and depression, and relatively high self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Escher’s study, using data from the 1998 General Social Survey, pointed to long-term effects of religious practice, with those affiliated with a religious tradition since age 16 showing a greater likelihood to be forgiving.

“What seems to matter in promoting forgiveness . . . is that a person adheres to a religion or a denomination; on the whole, the religiously unaffiliated have less of a propensity to forgive,” Escher wrote in the March issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

The findings also indicated that the setting of conditions on forgiveness, such as requiring acts of contrition, is associated with greater psychological distress. Researchers Neal Krause of the University of Michigan and Christopher Ellison of the University of Texas at San Antonio reported their findings a decade ago in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

“Those that forgive unconditionally are the ones that seem to have better mental health,” Krause said in an interview. “You get the hurt behind you.”

How people are treated at church—whether their fellow worshipers model compassion or judgment—also seems to make a difference. In a separate study of older adults published in the *Review of Religious Research*, Krause found results suggesting participants who were more satisfied with the emotional support they received from church members were more likely to forgive themselves than those who were not satisfied with the support they received.

Overall, the research seems to support the effectiveness of efforts to promote forgiveness. Churchgoers at a typical service are likely to hear prayers and sermons and experience rituals urging people to confess their sins and offer forgiveness to others.

But some sociologists also note what worshipers are less likely to hear is

encouragement to accept divine forgiveness for their own transgressions. Notre Dame’s Escher says that religious leaders may want to consider ways to incorporate rituals encouraging individuals to accept forgiveness of their own sins into more aspects of services. Perhaps even a prayer that goes something like: “Forgive your neighbor as yourself.” —David Briggs, thearda.com

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## Backers of gay marriage look for small victory

Jeff Zarrillo brought his case for gay marriage to the Supreme Court in late March because, he said, “the court is supposed to step in and protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority.” Edith Windsor brought her case for same-sex spousal benefits to the high court because, she said, “from my fourth-grade civics class, I somehow trust the Supreme Court to bring justice.”

Both Zarrillo, one of four people challenging California’s Proposition 8 ban on same-sex marriage, and Windsor, the New York widow challenging the Defense of Marriage Act, may win their cases when the Supreme Court rules in June. But few expect the type of landmark decisions that would make civil rights history.

Yet any victory may be good enough for proponents of marriage equality. “Sometimes, the court takes things in one fell swoop. Sometimes, it takes things one step at a time,” said Theodore Boutsouros, one of the lawyers representing the Proposition 8 challengers. “I think the path is clear. The law points all in one direction.”

Though proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage had anticipated a debate over discrimination and equal protection, at times the debate in the court revolved around issues of federal and state jurisdiction.

“I would have liked to see a bigger ‘Aha!’ moment—that at the heart of these cases is the need to get the law where the American people are already





**ACTIVISTS HOLD COURT OUTSIDE:** *Edie Windsor speaks outside the U.S. Supreme Court after oral arguments in her challenge to the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act.*

going, which is to embrace the full equality and inclusion of gay people in marriage and in American life,” said Evan Wolfson, president of the group Freedom to Marry.

Still, the result could be historic. By late June, wedding bells may be ringing for gay and lesbian couples in California, where one in eight Americans live. In nine other states and the District of Columbia, married same-sex couples may get full federal recognition and benefits.

Regardless of the court’s decisions in the Proposition 8 and the Defense of Marriage Act cases, gay marriage laws may be passed soon in four more states—Illinois, Minnesota, Rhode Island and Delaware. By the end of next year, the same could be true in New Jersey, Oregon and Hawaii.

Those who hope for landmark Supreme Court rulings similar to Justice Anthony Kennedy’s 2003 opinion in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down state sodomy laws, may have to wait a bit longer. Kennedy wrote then, “The state cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.” On gay marriage, however, he said in March, “we have five years of information to weigh against 2,000 years of history or more.”

“Those of us who were hoping for sort of the *Lawrence* of marriage—

sweeping, eloquent language vindicating the rights of gay and lesbian couples to get married—that looks rather unlikely,” said Elizabeth Wydra, chief counsel of the liberal Constitutional Accountability Center.

On the most momentous questions before them—Do gays and lesbians have a fundamental right to marry? Does the Constitution forbid restrictions on same-sex marriage? Do gays and lesbians qualify for heightened protection?—the justices indicated they may take a pass. That would prevent a 50-state, court-imposed solution.

“I think they realize what a significant step that would be,” said John Eastman, a law professor at Chapman University in California and chairman of the National Organization for Marriage, which opposes same-sex marriage. “The public opinion on this question might be changing, but it has not changed to the point that the court would be out front of two-thirds of the states in the country.”

That’s OK with Chad Griffin, a leader of the opposition to Proposition 8 who took over last year as president of the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s most influential gay rights group.

“There are multiple ways to victory here,” Griffin said. “We’ll see what this court does, and then we’ll see what fights we have left to fight.” —Richard Wolf, *USA Today*

## Pope says women in church have a ‘fundamental’ role

Pope Francis recently said women play a “fundamental role” in the Catholic Church as those who are mostly responsible for passing on the faith from one generation to the next.

While the new pope stopped far short of calling for women’s ordination or giving women more decision-making power in the church, his remarks nonetheless signaled an openness to women that’s not often seen in the church hierarchy.

“In the church and in the journey of faith, women have had and still have a special role in opening doors to the Lord,” the Argentinian pontiff said on April 3 during his weekly audience in St. Peter’s Square.

On March 28, Francis surprised Catholics—and irked traditionalists—when he included two women in a foot-washing ceremony at a youth prison in Rome.

Critics say the rite is a reenactment of Jesus’ washing the feet of the 12 male apostles, and the inclusion of women might reopen the debate over the ordination of women to the priesthood.

As Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, the future pope clearly stated his opposition to women priests. Still, advocates for women’s rights in the church hope Francis will give women more leadership positions within the church.

“There are some lay people in the Vatican leadership,” said Sister Christine Anderson, a British nun who trains women leaders in Catholic organizations throughout the world. “There is no reason why (women) couldn’t be there too.”

“Many women have more theology than some priests. So it’s not that we are not trained. . . . I think it’s really that we just have not grown up yet as a church,” she added.

Sister Chris Schenk, executive director of FutureChurch, a Cleveland-based group that advocates for a greater role for women in the church, said Francis has been “doing great” at the symbolic level since his election, but “the proof will be



in what steps the Vatican takes to begin to incorporate women's voices and experience at all levels of Church ministry and decision-making."

In his April 3 audience, the pope said "the mission of women, of mothers and women," in the church is "to give witness to their children and grandchildren that Christ is risen," a line that left Schenk "disappointed."

For Schenk, women are more than just mothers, and "there are many women leaders of faith communities around the world." She hopes Francis will allow women to become permanent deacons, the last step before the priesthood—a role that is currently open to married men. "This will effectively end the silencing of Catholic women in our churches," she said.

Ahead of the conclave that elected Francis, German cardinal Walter Kasper called for the creation of a new "deaconess" role within the church that would have different tasks from that of deacons.

For Sister Anderson, the controversy over women priests or deacons should not overshadow the real question of women's leadership within the church.

"I am not interested in being a priest," she said. "What I am interested in is, can we be part of the decision making? Can we be part, really, of the discussions? When there are discussions going on, it's all men."

During his April 3 audience, Francis highlighted the role of women in the church's earliest days, noting that the Gospels call them the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

At the time, women's testimony was considered unreliable, so if the story of Jesus' resurrection was "invented," the pope said, "it would not have been linked to the testimony of women." Instead, "the evangelists simply narrate what happened: the women were the first witnesses. This tells us that God does not choose according to human criteria."

—Alessandro Speciale, RNS

## Church must act decisively on sexual abuse, says pope

Pope Francis has called for strong, specific worldwide measures for the Roman Catholic Church to act "with determination" against the clergy sexual abuse scandal that has rocked the church for more than a decade.

It is one of the first actions on a major issue in Francis's weeks-old papacy, one that has been marked chiefly by attention to his humble, low-key style.

After he met April 5 with the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Archbishop Gerhard Ludwig Mueller, the Vatican said in a statement: "The Holy Father recommended that the congregation continue the line sought by Benedict XVI, to act with determination in regard to cases of sexual abuse."

Francis cited measures to protect minors, help victims of sexual violence, and take necessary action against perpetrators and emphasized that drafting and implementing directives by bishops' conferences around the world is important to the credibility of the church.

Francis concluded by saying, "Victims of abuse are present in a particular way in his prayers for those who are suffering," according to the Vatican press office.

U.S. victims of clergy sexual abuse have demanded swift and bold actions from the new pontiff. In Argentina, where the former cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was archbishop of Buenos Aires, he won praise for his simple lifestyle and focus on the poor but was criticized for failing to meet with abuse victims.

The April 5 actions also contain another clue to how Francis will be pope: he calls on the various national bishops' conferences around the world to step up in disciplining priests and serving victims, a possible indication that he will move from a strongly centralized government of the church to one that places increased authority locally.

In another signal, Francis did not emphasize the doctrinal issues that were behind a crackdown on American nuns and the disciplining of rogue theologians,

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**APPEAL TO IRAN:** Supporters of an Iranian-American minister who says he is being tortured in a Tehran prison hailed Secretary of State John Kerry's call for his release – a welcome step for advocates who had accused the State Department of being "AWOL" on the case when no representative showed up for a March 15 hearing on Capitol Hill. Rep. Trent Franks (R., Ariz.), a member of a human rights commission which held the hearing, criticized the State Department for "such a deafening and almost cowardly silence" about the case. Days later, however, Kerry said, "I am deeply concerned about the fate of U.S. citizen Saeed Abedini, who has been detained for nearly six months and was sentenced to eight years in prison in Iran on charges related to his religious beliefs."



which characterized the office under Pope Benedict XVI.

The abuse crisis exploded on the world stage in Boston in January 2002; by June that year, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops led the world in establishing a zero-tolerance policy for abusive priests, removing them from ministry and reaching out to victims.

But the leading group of victims in the U.S., the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), was not mollified by this sign of action. “A good sign doesn’t keep one child safe. Not one,” said SNAP executive director David Clohessy in comments on the papal statement.

The pope, he said, “is a man who has shown that he understands the power of gesture. And yet, within hours of becoming pope, he met with Cardinal (Bernard) Law, perhaps the most discredited bishop on the planet.”

Law was driven to resign as archbishop of Boston when it came to light that the archdiocese had protected and promoted predators and shuffled them among parishes. In the week before Easter, Law, who now lives in Rome, and Francis met at one of the churches where Francis came to pray.

Clohessy said the pope could have taken much sharper action, including calling on all bishops to give all of their files on known abusers to law enforcement and “sit down with secular lawmakers and work for better child safety laws.” —Cathy Lynn Grossman, *USA Today*/contributions from Kevin Eckstrom, RNS

## Obama recalls Holy Land at prayer breakfast

As he gathered with clergy at the White House on a Friday in early April, President Obama recounted personal details of his recent Holy Land trip, calling it a chance to experience “the eternal spirit of Easter” and feel closer to Jesus.

“For Christians to walk where he walked and see what he saw are blessed moments,” Obama told religious leaders April 5 at the Easter Prayer Breakfast.



RNS / ADELLE M. BANKS

**OPEN ABOUT FAITH:** President Obama speaks at a White House Easter-themed breakfast on April 5, an event that drew a wide variety of Christian leaders.

As in years past, Obama used the annual Easter-themed breakfast to meet with Christian leaders and also to speak openly about his faith.

The president said he visited Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity and the patriarch of Jerusalem led him to the 14-point silver star that marks where Jesus was born and “welcomed me to, in his words, ‘the place where heaven and Earth met.’”

Many of the faith leaders dining in the East Room murmured in appreciation as the president described his experience. “And there, I had a chance to pray and reflect on Christ’s birth, and his life, his sacrifice, his Resurrection,” he said, joining other “faithful pilgrims who for 2,000 years have done the same thing.”

Obama said he thought of the poor and marginalized and of future pilgrims who would travel to the same sacred spot. “I was reminded that while our time on Earth is fleeting, he is eternal,” the president said. “His life, his lessons live on in our hearts and, most importantly, in our actions.”

Attendees included megachurch pastors Joel Hunter of Florida and Bishop T. D. Jakes of Texas; Bishop John Bryant, senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; National Council of Churches president Kathryn Lohre and

National Association of Evangelicals president Leith Anderson; and Luis Cortes, founder of Esperanza, a Hispanic evangelical faith-based network.

Despite such events, polling has shown that a significant minority of Americans still believe Obama is a Muslim. A 2012 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that 17 percent of respondents held that belief about the president, while 49 percent said he was a Christian and 31 percent did not know his faith.

In his weekly address before Easter, the president made a point of describing his Christian family. “As Christians, my family and I remember the incredible sacrifice Jesus made for each and every one of us—how he took on the sins of the world and extended the gift of salvation,” he said.

Obama added that they are committed to following Jesus’ example: “To loving our Lord and Savior. To loving our neighbors. And to seeing in everyone, especially ‘the least of these,’ as a child of God.”

In remarks introducing the president, Vice President Joe Biden recounted his recent trip to Rome for the installation of Pope Francis, saying he was moved by the new pope’s focus on justice. —Adelle M. Banks, RNS



## Liberty expands rules on concealed-gun permits

Trustees of Liberty University have changed the Christian school's weapons policy to allow students, staff and visitors with concealed-carry permits to bring weapons into all campus facilities except for dormitories.

The policy went into effect March 22, after trustees reportedly voted unanimously to loosen a previous policy where guns were allowed on campus but not inside buildings.

"I think it's a positive thing for security that there's at least a chance that somebody responsible will be carrying a firearm when something like [the Virginia Tech massacre] happens," Liberty University chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. told the *Lynchburg News & Advance*.

The revised codesays people "who hold a valid concealed weapons permit recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia may possess and carry such concealed weapon on University property and in University facilities, and may store the approved weapon in a secured container or compartment in their vehicle while on University property."

Liberty's website lists more than two dozen schools with similar policies that permit students and others to have concealed weapons on campus. They include the University of Colorado, Michigan State University, University of Mississippi and University of Utah. None of the listed schools is religiously affiliated.

The private Christian university started by the late Jerry Falwell describes itself as the "largest Christian university in the world." Its vision is to "train Champions for Christ as a world-class university." The school emphasizes "biblical morality" and "a solid doctrinal statement that truly sets us apart from other schools."

"Everything we do is designed to develop Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge and skills essential to impact tomorrow's world," the statement says.

Liberty has ties to the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, and

several prominent Southern Baptist Convention leaders are current or former trustees.

Liberty declined to revise its weapons policy in 2009 after students started an online petition claiming the current policy affected only responsible gun owners and that anyone intending to cause harm with a weapon wouldn't be deterred by a policy. —Bob Allen, ABP

## People

■ **Russell Moore**, the dean of theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, has been named president of the denomination's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Moore, 41, succeeds Richard Land, who announced his plans to retire last July after a stormy few months when he was caught up in allegations of racism and plagiarism. Moore has been outspoken on traditional conservative issues but has also been an advocate for adoption and is one of several prominent denominational leaders who supported last year's election of Fred Luter as the SBC's first African-American president. The commission, with offices in Nashville, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., serves as the Southern Baptists' top public policy voice, and its president is often more visible than the men who serve two one-year terms as the denomination's president.

■ **Emilio Castro**, a Methodist pastor and theologian from Uruguay who served as general secretary of the World Council of Churches from 1985 to 1992, died April 6 in Montevideo, Uruguay. He was 85. At his death, WCC officials remembered "his unfaltering efforts in bringing together Christian faith and spirituality with radical commitment in the struggles for justice." Castro joined the Geneva-based WCC as director of the council's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in 1973. In that role, "Castro paved the way for the active participation of churches from Eastern European countries in the life" of the WCC, said Olav Fykse Tveit, the present general secretary. During social unrest in Uruguay in the 1970s, he fostered dialogues between con-

tending political forces. For his efforts in defending human rights in Latin America in the 1980s, Castro was awarded Orden de Bernardo O'Higgins, the highest honor given by the Chilean government. Walter Altmann, the WCC's Central Committee moderator, said "Castro was one of the most outstanding ecumenical leaders in Latin America" as well as "an eloquent preacher."

■ Evangelical Christian **J. David Kuo**, 44, once a top official for President George W. Bush's faith-based initiative who subsequently left the administration for failing to live up to promises of spending on big projects of "compassionate conservatism," died April 5. Kuo's death was announced by his family in Charlotte, North Carolina, noting his strong faith in "a courageous ten-year battle against brain cancer." Kuo joined the Bush staff in January 2001 and left at the end of 2003 as deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In essays and interviews, including one on *60 Minutes*, Kuo openly expressed his disenchantment with political operatives, although other Bush aides in the faith office disputed accounts of cynicism that Kuo had described. His book, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, was published in 2006.

■ **Duke McCall**, a denominational leader known by Baptists worldwide for a ministry that spanned four decades, died April 2 at age 98. McCall was chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Convention's executive committee 1946–1951, then served for 30 years as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Admired in both conservative and moderate circles, he sided with moderates against a "conservative resurgence" and ran for SBC president in 1982, losing narrowly. Following retirement, McCall held a five-year term as president of the Baptist World Alliance. "He served Baptists faithfully, but he recognized that God wasn't a Baptist," Chris Caldwell, one of McCall's successors at Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, told the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. "He had a broader view of the church. He was a larger than life figure, a charming gentleman."



# LIVING BY The Word

## *Ascension of the Lord* *Acts 1:1–11; Luke 24:44–53*

**THE AUGUSTA** Victoria Hospital sits on the highest point of the Mount of Olives, one of the sites claimed to be the place from which Jesus ascended into heaven. Administered by the Lutheran World Federation, hospital staff serve Palestinians who are living in the midst of occupation. Every day medical personnel and patients navigate Israeli checkpoints and closures to reach this hospital in East Jerusalem, which is renowned for its radiation therapy and pediatric kidney dialysis.

From a church tower on the grounds one can see the Israeli settlement of Ma'ale Adumim and the separation barrier that snakes across the West Bank landscape. Next door is the land known as Area E-1. Palestinians and international governments oppose Israel's plans to build here, as it is the last remaining West Bank land that connects East Jerusalem to the rest of Palestinian territory.

A late 19th-century mosaic on the high apse wall of the hospital's Church of the Ascension portrays the ascending Jesus on a cloud and flanked by two angels. The angels are gazing not up at the ascending Jesus but out toward the congregation. They point both us and the disciples in this text earthward: "Why are you standing looking up toward heaven?" they ask.

The ascension is not about Jesus' absence but about his presence in the world in a new way. Rather than turning our gaze to heaven to await Christ's return on the Mount of Olives, these earthly minded angels turn our gaze out into the world.

Jerusalem plays a crucial role in Luke's narrative. It is the place where the disciples will be clothed with "power from on high." In Acts, Jerusalem is the place from which the risen Jesus' mission goes forth to the ends of the earth. In Luke (unlike Mark and Matthew), the disciples are instructed not to go north to meet the risen Christ, but to stay in the city of Jerusalem and await the Holy Spirit.

The story of the ascension forms a chronological bridge between the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, between the time of Jesus and the time of the church. Luke is the only Gospel writer to distinguish Jesus' ascension from his resurrection as a separate event. Luke actually tells the story twice, once at the end of the Gospel (although some manuscripts lack "and was carried up into heaven" in Luke 24:51) and again at the beginning of Acts. There is an interesting chronological disparity between the two accounts. In Luke 24 Jesus ascends late on Easter Day itself, whereas in Acts 1 his ascension is delayed until "after forty days."

The Luke 24 ascension narrative takes place on the same

long Easter Day that saw Jesus walking on the Emmaus road and finally appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem. Like the Emmaus conversation earlier in the day, Jesus' goal is to teach us about the scriptures. As a first theme of the story, he "opened the disciples' minds" to understand the law, the prophets and the psalms—naming all three parts of the Bible—so that they might be witnesses to the fulfillment of God's word.

Blessing is the second important theme of the Lucan story, with the threefold repetition of the word *eulogeō*. Jesus' last act on earth is to raise his hands in blessing over the disciples. As he is blessing them, he is parted from them. His followers then return to Jerusalem where they too are continually "blessing" God.

Acts tells the ascension story both to narrate Jesus' departure and to discourage expectations and speculations about the timetable of Jesus' return. In response to questions of chronology such as the question posed by the disciples, Jesus replies with words that bear repeating today: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons." Jesus specifically orders the disciples not to try to calculate the date of his return. It's as if he, in concert with those earth-facing angels, believes other things should be occupying our attention in this postresurrection era.

What is it those angels invite us to see on the earth from the Mount of Olives? There's plenty for us to notice. It could be the beauty of the Dead Sea and Jordan River to the east, where John the Baptist baptized people into his renewal movement, or the brown hills and Bedouin tents or Palestinian stone homes of E-1, which are threatened with demolition today. Gazing south we see the families traveling circuitous roads from Bethlehem or Beit Jala, braving checkpoints to seek medical care on this mountain. Looking to the west, perhaps we are to take notice of the city of Jerusalem, over which Jesus wept and weeps still, the city that is holy to three faiths often at odds with one another today.

If Jesus' ascension is to have meaning, it must be by way of underscoring Jesus' presence still on earth. And that is through us. The ascension unexpectedly turns our gaze earthward—to the medical care on this holy site at Augusta Victoria Hospital, and beyond, to every place on earth where God's people work as agents of hope and healing in the midst of struggle.

Brazilian theologian Vitor Westhelle argues that this is the meaning of the statement of the angels in Acts 1:11—that just as we experienced Jesus first on earth and then departing to heaven, so will we experience him coming again from earth. Earth is the place to look for his presence. The disciples' response to ascension can be ours as well. We return with great joy, "blessing God," and then set out in ministry.



# Reflections on the lectionary

**Sunday, May 12**

*Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21; John 17:20–26*

**BARBARA KINGSOLVER** explores the dystopic effects of climate change in *Flight Behavior*, a novel about a family and community struggling through the rainiest winter in memory. Sheep farmer Dellarobia Turnbow lives on a wooded hill that unexpectedly becomes the winter hibernation grounds for millions of monarch butterflies when weather chaos disrupts the species' normal migration pattern.

Scientist Ovid Byron arrives to study the phenomenon and sees a dire future for the species: "I am a doctor of natural systems," he says. "And this looks terminal to me."

At first Dellarobia disagrees and is fascinated by the beauty of the scene. "I just can't see it being all that bad," she says. But by the end of the novel Dellarobia understands the science of climate change and realizes that the presence of butterflies on her hill means that she is in effect living on a different planet.

John of Patmos's project in the book of Revelation is similar to Ovid Byron's work: both help people see that it *is*, in fact, "all that bad." John too is a "doctor of natural systems." He diagnoses the entire Roman imperial system as monstrous, even Satanic, as it devours peoples and the whole of creation with its predatory economy. Yet unlike Byron, John has a twofold project as a doctor: he diagnoses the situation as terminal, and then he gives people the medicine—a vision of hope.

That hope comes in Revelation 22 through the liturgical invitation. "Let everyone who is thirsty come." John has led us through 20 chapters of dire diagnosis. His mission has been to help communities of Jesus' followers see the inevitable end that lies ahead and then to give them the courage to "come out" of empire before it is too late (Rev. 18:4). John leads his communities on an exodus journey into the Lamb's vision of hope and gives the invitation to come into the holy city: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates."

No vision is more urgently needed. The preacher's task is to help people embrace that tree of life whose leaves are medicine for our world. Doctor John of Patmos helped people find that medicine 2,000 years ago. Scientists like Ovid Byron—the doctors of natural systems—call us to take the medicine today. Dellarobia tells Byron that "people can only see things they already recognize." Preachers help us to recognize things—both the dire predicament and the way ahead. The medicine

we need is the Bible's tree of life, as well as those glimpses of that tree of life that are dawning already in our own holy cities.

For the first-century community, Revelation's proclamation of the impending end referred not so much to the end of the world (*kosmos*) as the end of the whole toxic system of Roman rule (*oikoumenē*). Against Rome's own eschatological claims that it would rule forever, Revelation proclaimed that the end would take place soon (Rev. 1:1), thus offering comfort and assurance to God's saints who cried out, "How long, O Lord?" (Rev. 6:10).

Revelation ends as it began, pronouncing as "blessed" (*makarios*) those who hear and keep what is written. The tree of life and the New Jerusalem had been promised in the opening letters to Ephesus and Philadelphia (Rev. 2:7, 3:12). Now the beatitude of Revelation 22:14 confirms those promises.

Revelation 22 invites us to drink deeply from its metaphors of promise and warning, vision and blessing. With its diagnosis of the pathology of empire, it can help us frame dire issues such as climate change.

Revelation's apocalyptic journey concludes with a liturgical dialogue. The antiphonal "Come" is a eucharistic liturgy in which the Spirit and the bridal New Jerusalem invite everyone

## John of Patmos is a "doctor of natural systems."

who thirsts to "take the water of life." Drinking and eating at the eucharistic table give us a glimpse of God's future holy city and a taste of its life-giving water. It is a mystical invitation.

Likewise, John 17 is a mystical chapter. While the eschatology of Revelation could not be more different from the eschatology of the Gospel of John, both passages share a deep sense of vision. Both believe that the mystical encounter with God's sacramental presence can heal us.

The prayer of John 17 gives us a window into the heart of God. "In-ness" and "one-ness" flow back and forth in this prayer, perhaps playing on the similarity of the two words in Greek (*en* and *hen*). In the mystical geography of God's love, we are now "in" Jesus and he is in us, just as he and the Father are in one another. Love is at the heart of this prayer and at the heart of Revelation. Out of love, God gives the water of life *dō rean* ("without cost") to everyone who thirsts. Out of love, God gives the tree of life with its leaves for healing.

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*The author is Barbara Rossing, who is professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.*

# Chaste romance

by Valerie Weaver-Zercher

**CALLING SOMEONE** nostalgic is an “affectionate insult at best,” Svetlana Boym has written, and few people appreciate the affection. Although the term has shed its medical connotations—it was first used in the late 17th century to describe the physical ailments of Swiss soldiers stationed in France and Italy—nostalgia remains an unwelcome diagnosis. (Nostalgia comes from *nostos*, meaning “return home,” and *algia*, meaning “longing.”) Viewed by many as “an ethical and aesthetic failure,” writes Boym, nostalgia usually evokes bathos and schmaltz. If memory is the respectable and even manly recollection of the past, nostalgia is its cloying cousin, the girl with the soppy smile.

So when an entire genre of fiction coalesces around plots, characters and settings that emerge straight from an imagined past, many have a hard time taking it seriously. Women selling jams and relishes, men with horse-drawn plows turning dark clods of soil, couples stealing chaste kisses behind the barn, families sitting down together for hand-mashed potatoes and three kinds of pie: these are the markers of Amish romance fiction, a subgenre that has astounded observers with its massive success and apparent staying power.

During 2012, a new Amish romance novel appeared on the market about every four days. The top three novelists of Amish fiction have sold a combined total of more than 24 million books, and a quarter of the titles on a recent Christian fiction best-seller list were Amish. Articles about Amish fiction have appeared in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *USA Today* and *Salon*, to name a few. And like the Amish, who themselves are spawning new communities at an astounding rate, Amish fiction is calving new genres of Plain romance, including novels about Mennonites, Moravians, Puritans and the Amana colonies.

Beloved by many readers of Christian fiction, who enter their favorite authors’ Facebook drawings for free books and quilts and trips to Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, Amish novels draw readers looking for a “clean read.” Just as fervent as the fans are the critics, including one who suggests that the readers of the genre are “non-Amish religious women who somehow wish they could be even more repressed by a traditional Western religion than they already are.”

I spoke with members of both camps—Amish fiction’s loyal readers and its dedicated critics—in researching my book *Thrill of the Chaste: The Allure of Amish Romance Novels*. I corresponded with readers of Amish fiction, met with them

over coffee, asked them to answer an informal survey and visited a book group that was discussing an Amish-themed novel. I lurked on Amish fiction discussion boards and Facebook pages and talked to authors of Amish fiction who relayed to me comments from their readers. I also spoke with literary agents, editors, marketers, booksellers and scholars. As I listened, I became convinced that the connection between Amish fiction and nostalgia is more complicated than it appears.

## Do novels about Amish life encourage nostalgia or foster new ways of living?

The eagerness with which a mostly female evangelical readership has embraced Amish novels is often regarded as evidence of disturbing nostalgia: a longing for a more wholly Christian, white, rural, patriarchal time and place. Others have suggested simply that evangelical women, weary of the hyperactive pace of life and the exigencies of a not yet recovered economy, enjoy traveling to an imagined location in which soccer leagues for four-year-olds and second incomes are unnecessary.

“These books take people out of the world of cell phones and being on 24-7,” a marketing manager suggested to me. “The family gathers around the table for meals and they pray together and they go visiting and it’s all family, family, family. For a lot of people, especially moms, they’re saying ‘Gee, that’s the life I wish I had.’” One reader I interviewed kept switching to past tense when talking about the Amish, and a Christian publishing insider told me that Amish fiction does well because, although most Amish novels are set in the present, they *feel* historical to readers: “We actually see Amish as a subgenre of historical, even though it’s contemporary, which is part of the reason it’s really thrived.” One literary agent told me that economic recessions often fund the popularity of nostalgia-driven genres, and it is true that in the two years after the

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Great Recession began, the production of Amish fiction titles doubled—and then doubled again.

Christian fiction is not the only expression of wistfulness. According to music writer Simon Reynolds in his book *Retromania*, pop culture has begun to double back on itself, becoming preoccupied with the artifacts, sounds and looks of the not-so-distant past. “Nostalgia is now thoroughly entwined with the consumer-entertainment complex,” Reynolds writes. In an April 2011 *New Yorker* piece, Adam Gopnik describes what he calls the “Golden Forty-Year Rule”: American popular culture hallows the trends of 40 years earlier. He attributes the four-decade nostalgia wave to the fact that much of the film, literature and music that make up popular culture are fashioned by fortysomethings, who have grown fond of the era in which they were conceived. The residents of the 1960s were enthralled with World War I and the *Titanic* and my peers are held rapt by *Mad Men*. “Forty years past is the potentially fascinating time just as we arrived, when our parents were youthful and in love, the Edenic period preceding the fallen state recorded in our actual memories,” declares Gopnik.

Interestingly enough, the Amish fiction boom seems to confirm Gopnik’s rule. In a 2011 article in *Christianity Today*, historian Eric Miller posits that evangelical readers superimpose their own tradition’s story on top of the religious story of Amish protagonists. The authors of Amish fiction, Miller says, use the Amish as an “adequately alien, adequately familiar community to imaginatively work out persisting cultural and theological questions.” In Gopnik’s terms, writers and readers of Amish fiction, by reading about a separatist, world-rejecting community of faith, are returning to a simulacrum of 1960s conservative Protestantism. This was before the rise of the Moral Majority and the accrual of power and attention to evangelicalism during the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1960s, being an evangelical still meant feeling embattled by shifting societal mores and contributing to what James Davison Hunter calls the “strong subcultural infrastructure” of religious radio programs, Christian schooling and evangelical media. By reading about the Amish, who remain set apart from the world more than most Christians, evangelical readers get to rehearse an earlier time in their own history, before their divorce rates approximated that of nonevangelicals and before prominence had bred acculturation.

Most readers of Amish fiction are not descendants of the Amish, of course, just as most Americans didn’t have dads

anything like Don Draper. Nor do the Amish dwell in some prelapsarian paradise—as most readers are well aware. But an imagined homeland need resemble an actual one only a little; nostalgia is, in the words of Boym, the “longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed.” Thus, many evangelical Christians articulate a vague sense that the Amish are spiritual forebears of a sort: living ancestors who have somehow survived into the 21st century. “The Amish kind of remind me of when I was a kid,” one reader told me. “Our life was much simpler. . . . Amish fiction is like we used to live, and we’ve kind of marched on and left all that behind. So it’s kind of nice to go back.”

The notion that we all used to be Amish, and that the Amish story is really *our* story, is problematic at best, and we should not dismiss too quickly the dangers of appropriating another culture or religious group’s narrative. But exploring issues of appropriation goes beyond the purview of this piece. What remains is to consider whether the nostalgia fueling the Amish fiction craze is mere dysfunctional retreat, or whether it might provide what sociologist Janelle Wilson calls a “sanctuary of meaning”: a place from which readers can imagine alternative values and practices.

Do Katie Lapp and Rhoda Byler and Sarah Beachy and all the other protagonists in Amish fiction usher readers into a past-focused trance, or might these heroines collectively inspire readers to envision a different future—one that is a little freer from the reign of technology, the ever-expanding demands of consumption and the primacy of the self? Might Christian nostalgia, wrapped in a cape dress and sealed with a kiss, have anything to do with the future?

Offering one definitive answer to those questions would be too simple. The meanings of texts are as multiple and unique as the readers who construct them. Some readers of Amish fiction may put their love of the genre to work in raising the barn of an imagined, whitewashed Christian past, in which virtue looks a lot like patriarchy and godliness a lot like parochialism. Others may use Amish fiction as a tool to hammer out a countercultural vision of community, simplicity and pacifism, a disciplined, embodied faith. Generalizing about either scenario is not helpful. But for observers who may be tempted to write off Amish novels as pious formula fiction, it’s important to note the constructive possibilities inherent in nostalgia.

Recognizing that scripture is infused with nostalgia is one



step in this direction. From the backward glance of Lot's wife (Gen. 19), to the homesick Hebrew exiles hanging their harps on willows (Ps. 137), to Jesus' longing that Jerusalem would be the city of peace that it had once been (Luke 19:42), the Bible is full of the bittersweet memory of places and times to which characters cannot return. Yet Zion is both departure point and destination, and in some ways we only recognize the latter by remembering the former. Nostalgia can thus serve as a guiding force—a generative impulse that has as much to do with the future as with the past. Recalling our former home helps us to locate our eternal one. *This world is not my home, I'm just passing through* need not be mere escapist fantasy; it can also serve as a declaration of independence from the manifold gods of the contemporary age.

Boym acknowledges this sturdier version of nostalgia. Nostalgia frequently glances “sideways,” Boym writes, rather than backward to the past: sideways, in this case, to the Amish, who exist somewhere in our peripheral vision rather than in memory. The notion that the Amish are *still* living this way, the way that many people think “we used to live,” as one reader told me, means that the Amish—at least the fictional ones—have escaped both the advances and declines of the modern world. Janelle Wilson writes, “When so many threats and obstacles to constructing a coherent, consistent self abound, the acts of remembering, recalling, reminiscing, and the corollary emotion of nostalgia may facilitate the kind of coherence, consistency, and sense of identity that each of us so desperately needs.” She quotes communication theorist Roger Aden, who has written that nostalgia can provide individuals with a “secure place of resistance.”

Claiming that Amish fiction is a literature of resistance would be farfetched, but it would be just as wrong to claim that it is only caked in sentimentality. In my interviews with readers of Amish fiction, many shared with me the sense that they were being changed for the better by their reading. One reader told me that as a result of reading Amish novels, she is trying “not to purchase items just for the sake of purchasing them.” Another reader posted on an Amish fiction discussion website, “Other than the Bible, the Amish books have changed my life more than any other

books. I am now more aware of keeping life simple, of putting family and community high priority, relishing the simple in what I buy, etc.”

One college-aged reader liked how the genre confirms her own antipathy toward videogames and other digital distractions, and several other readers mentioned that Amish fiction inspires them to hold onto many of the practices they see slipping away from contemporary life: eating together as a family, caring for one's neighbors, prioritizing one's local congregation, resisting the urge to buy every new gadget, choosing to forgive. These and other readers are finding in Amish fiction a “sanctuary of meaning,” as Wilson calls it: a safe place from which to name the costs of technological progress and the lies of consumer capitalism and from which to imagine an alternative.

Such nostalgia is roomy enough to contain the past and the future. Indeed, the happy endings of Amish romance novels demonstrate the eschatological potential of this much-maligned emotion. Historian Lynn Neal, in her book *Romancing God*, suggests that although critics often see the uniformly happy endings of evangelical romance novels as evidence of “naive optimism, a childish fantasy,” they actually offer “a theology of hope and perseverance.” Another critic suggests that romance novels are “narrative eschatology”: stories about how to get to an “eschaton of love, completion, fulfillment, happiness, generational continuity, maturity, and hope.”

So rather than discounting the readers of Amish fiction as nostalgics pining for an idealized past, we might listen to the meaning that they are making and the type of longing that flavors their words. It is possible that Amish romance novels are helping many readers imagine a sideways route to happiness. “We should perhaps not too quickly discount the idealized images of the Amish that pervade mainstream culture,” historian Paul Boyer once wrote. “As Thoreau argued, it is good for societies to think about alternative social models, even if the process involves distortions and misperceptions.”

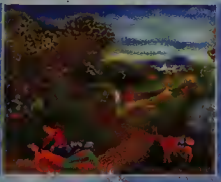
Thinking about an alternative social model and constructing one are two radically different things, and no evidence suggests that Amish fiction readers are en masse setting about revising cultural codes or establishing countercultural communities. But my conversations with readers suggest that

many are doing more than pining for some mist-shrouded past; they are envisioning an alternate future for themselves and their families and their churches.

Boym's declaration that we moderns are “nostalgic for a time when we were not nostalgic” is certainly true. But Christian readers, whether or not we care for Amish romance fiction, also long for a time when we *will no longer be* nostalgic. Actual Amish life may resemble Zion only a little, but fictional Amish life is close enough to nurture in many readers a yearning not only for the Old Order but for the order of things to come. CC

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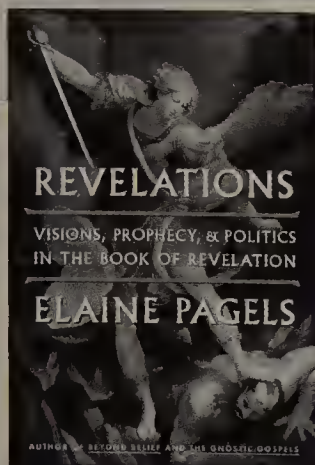
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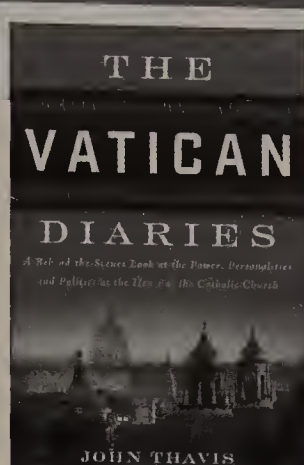
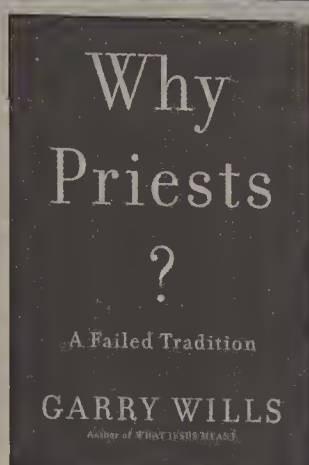
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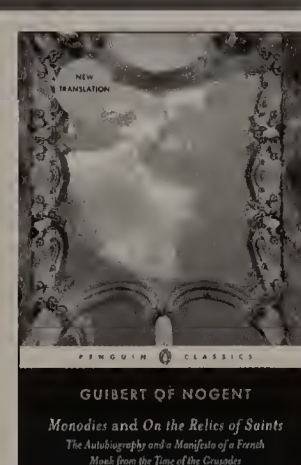
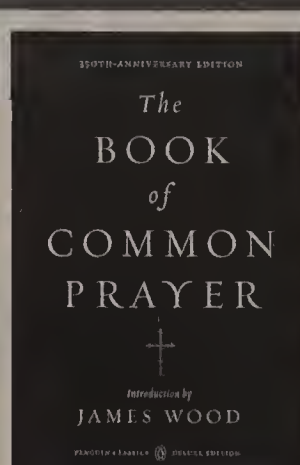
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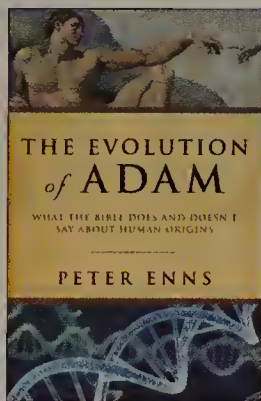




# Take & read

## Old Testament

***The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins***, by Peter Enns (Brazos, 192 pp., \$17.99 paperback). On the basis of what is known about Genesis, its origins and its subsequent interpretation, Enns argues in this sensitive and highly readable book that modern evolutionary science can coexist with the scriptural account of creation in Christian understanding. Writing with high respect for scripture, he cogently assembles information and perspectives to help Christians understand Genesis on its own terms and navigate the troubled passage between science and theology.



***Jewish Interpretation of the Bible: Ancient and Contemporary***, by Karin Hedner Zetterholm (Fortress, 224 pp., \$32.00 paperback). Jewish interpreters both paved the way for Christian understanding of scripture and continued to offer alternative paths. Zetterholm introduces the ancient rabbinical developers of the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrashim, explores the Jewish character of Jesus' and Paul's understandings of the Hebrew Bible and describes the various streams of Judaism alive today, along with their approaches to scripture.



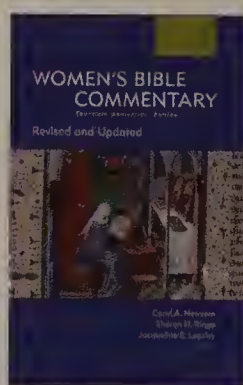
***The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy***, by Eric A. Seibert (Fortress, 232 pp., \$23.00 paperback). This is one of three new books that examine the troubling problem of divinely sanctioned violence within scripture. This straightforward and pastoral treatment begins with the premise that "the Bible should never be used to inspire, promote, or justify acts of violence." Seibert distinguishes between reading the Bible compliantly and reading it conversationally, and he commends critical, ethically constructive readings of the texts, especially texts that have been used to justify war and brutality against women.

***Sacred Word, Broken Word: Biblical Authority and the Dark Side of Scripture***, by Kenton L. Sparks (Eerdmans, 192 pp., \$20.00 paperback). An engaging, plainspoken path through the complexities of scriptural hermeneutics and interpretation, this book is particularly intended for evangelical readers seeking to grapple with passages that commend violence and with other

challenges to modern sensibilities, including scripture's internal contradictions. For Sparks, scripture reflects the realities of a created world that is inherently good, altogether broken and in the process of being redeemed.

***Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses***, by Philip Jenkins (HarperOne, 320 pp., \$15.99 paperback). To Christians and Jews who are more prone to point out violence in the Qur'an than in the Bible, Jenkins advises close scrutiny of our own heritage and history. His examination of Christian amnesia concerning both the Bible and the postbiblical world opens ground for dialogue with Muslims over religious extremism and helps readers to understand not only the Bible but the ways adherents of other religions read their scriptures.

***Jeremiah: Pain and Promise***, by Kathleen M. O'Connor (Fortress, 192 pp., \$42.00 paperback). O'Connor employs both her empathetic imagination and the discipline of trauma studies to open her discussion of the peculiar and pain-filled book of Jeremiah, calling it "a relentless quest for meaning" in the midst of suffering and displacement. Arranging passages by genre, she seeks redeeming value in much of its extreme language as it grapples with the ancient traumas of the Babylonian exile and calls out to later people who seek language as extreme as their own sorrows, as resilient as their own hopes.



***Women's Bible Commentary (20th anniversary edition)***, edited by Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Westminster John Knox, 680 pp., \$50.00). The 20th anniversary edition of this popular one-volume commentary updates every article and adds many new essays, including 13 on key biblical women and interpretation of them through the ages. The commentary stands as a primary source for those seeking to know more about women in the Bible and about the discoveries of those who read the Bible not only as scholars but as daughters, mothers and wives.

***The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name: The God of Sinai in Our Midst***, by Michael P. Knowles (InterVarsity Press, 254 pp., \$22.00 paperback). Beginning with God's self-revelation in Exodus 34 ("The Lord, the Lord, a God compassionate and gracious"), Knowles unfolds, piece by piece, the divine attri-

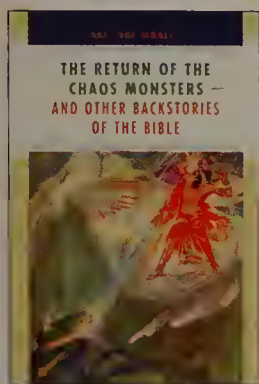
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*Selected by Patricia K. Tull, who taught Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.*



butes named in this passage, exploring their meaning in Exodus and throughout scripture and Abrahamic tradition. This is not an academic exercise. Encountering God through these words opens the way to imitating God more fully: "The character of God is most relevant to those who seek to live by it."

***Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament*, by L. Juliana M. Claassens** (Westminster John Knox, 140 pp., \$25.00 paperback). Among the varied metaphors for God in the Bible are ones that show God in roles typically reserved for women: as a mother giving birth to new realities, as a mourner over national and personal suffering and as a midwife drawing new life into being. With these roles, the function of God as a delivering presence takes on new and creative dimensions in both the Bible and the contemporary world, including Claassens's native South Africa.

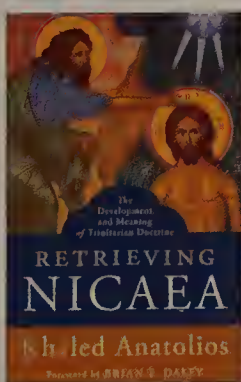


***The Return of the Chaos Monsters— and Other Backstories of the Bible*, by Gregory Mobley** (Eerdmans, 167 pp., \$16.00 paperback). As the sassy title hints, this book is fun. Wise, deep and learned, it roams through creation like Job's Satan to point out archetypal narratives functioning both in ourselves and in scripture. Mobley examines the deep structures of seven biblical storylines that disturb and move readers,

beginning with the backstory of creation that is detectable in the Bible's first two verses: "God has subdued chaos, just barely."

## Theology

***Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, by Khaled Anatolios** (Baker Academic, 352 pp., \$39.99). This book makes for challenging reading, but its ambition of retrieving the systematic scope of Nicene trinitarianism for contemporary theology rewards the effort. A careful and generous reader of the fourth- and fifth-century debates, Anatolios reaches beyond abstract historical and doctrinal understandings to the trinitarian piety reflected in Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine and encourages contemporary readers to likewise allow themselves "to be determined by God's trinitarian being."



***iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment*, by D. Brent Laytham** (Cascade, 220 pp., \$24.00 paperback). As his playful title suggests, Laytham uses a light touch to tackle a multifaceted cultural issue with enormous

ramifications for Christian life. Considering everything from Twitter to spectator sports, from video games to "celebrity audio Bibles," Laytham thoughtfully explores Western forms of entertainment and their colonization of our habits and imaginations. He defends the proper place of trivial pursuits in our lives while alerting us to how entertainments distort life and draw us into idolatry.

***The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*, by Daniel M. Bell Jr.** (Baker Academic, 224 pp., \$19.99 paperback). Bell joins a chorus of voices offering a sustained theological critique of capitalism, but he does so with a particular concern for providing guidance to the church. *The Economy of Desire* draws on the postmodern theorists Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, but the heart of Bell's vision for an alternative "Christian economics" is Augustinian. As Bell admits, we cannot simply vacate the "earthly city" of capitalism in favor of some separate Christian economic zone. But by uncovering the central doctrines of "capitalist theology," especially its anthropology of insatiable desire, Bell hopes to clear the way for the church to model a "healing of human desire turned outward to service and gift, all for the sake of community."

***Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace*, by Amos Yong** (Baylor University Press, 246 pp., \$29.95 paperback). One of the foremost Pentecostal theologians, Yong offers an ecumenical and interdisciplinary theology of the Holy Spirit that engages both theological and scientific approaches. His aim is twofold: to uncover a Pentecostal emphasis on love, which has often been overshadowed by attention to the power of the Spirit, and to show that Pentecostal understandings of the Spirit can make a contribution to larger Christian discussions of God's love.

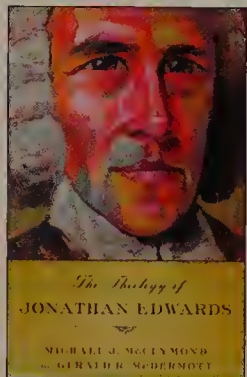


***A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth*, by Aidan Nichols** (Baker Academic, 128 pp., \$18.00 paperback). ***Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, by Karen Kilby** (Eerdmans, 188 pp., \$23.00 paperback). Balthasar is widely regarded as the most important Catholic theologian of the 20th century and has garnered enormous scholarly attention in recent decades, yet his immense output and distinctive style make his works very daunting to read without assistance. These two books can help. Nichols uses the words *being*, *form*, *freedom* and *logic* to bring Balthasar's great trilogy on beauty, goodness and truth into focus. Kilby explores the formative influences on and distinctive thought patterns of Balthasar's theology. She recognizes Balthasar's monumental achievement and raises very critical questions about his approach.

*Selected by Amy Plantinga Pauw, who teaches theology at Louisville Seminary in Kentucky and is general editor of Belief, a theological commentary series published by Westminster John Knox.*



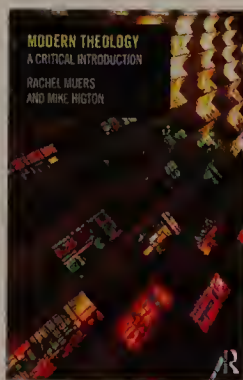
***Walking Together: Christian Thinking and Public Life in South Africa*, edited by Joel Carpenter** (Abilene Christian University Press, 384 pp., \$28.99 paperback). This edited volume brings together reflections of African and North American Christians from various racial and confessional backgrounds who share a “commitment to think and live in the public arena from the perspective of Christian faith.” The authors “plunged into the deep end of South African reality” during an intensive period of meeting and traveling together and came away with new insights and questions about Christian faith and public life in a global context. For the North American authors, this involved wrestling anew with the racism and economic inequalities of their own culture.



***The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, by Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott** (Oxford University Press, 784 pp., \$65.00). Drawing on both the large corpus of Edwards’s own writings and the mountain of secondary literature emerging from an extraordinary renaissance in Edwards studies over the last several decades, McClymond and McDermott have produced the most comprehensive treatment of Edwards’s

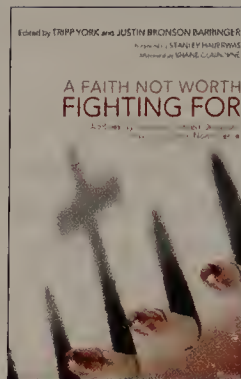
thought available. The authors make a spirited case for Edwards’s contemporary value as “a point of reference for theological interchange and dialogue.”

***Modern Theology: A Critical Introduction*, by Rachel Muers and Mike Higon** (Routledge, 400 pp., \$39.95 paperback). This engagingly written textbook serves as both a historical and a theological introduction to the modern period in theology. Divided into two sections, on key thinkers and key themes, it traces the development of 19th-century Western theology, then illuminates the many bridges to contemporary theological concerns. A glossary, an annotated bibliography and plentiful illustrations make it an ideal guide to or refresher course on classic voices and new debates.



***Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation*, by Peter Goodwin Heltzel** (Eerdmans, 219 pp., \$25.00 paperback). Heltzel’s prophetic evangelicalism uses the motif of improvisational jazz, especially John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*, to model how theology can draw on jazz traditions to speak a new word to injustice, racial bigotry and the concerns of the poor and marginalized. The book’s title recalls the shantytown built on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., after Martin Luther King’s assassination. Heltzel draws inspiration from the black freedom struggle to craft a biblical theology of justice and love that summons Christian communities to anticipate the resurrection city of God’s reign here and now.

## Ethics

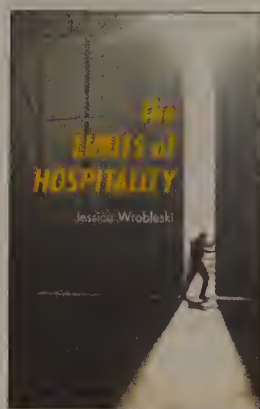


***A Faith Not Worth Fighting For: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Nonviolence*, edited by Tripp York and Justin Bronson Barringer** (Cascade, 256 pp., \$28.00 paperback). Many people assume that Christian pacifists lack good or even coherent answers to hard questions: Shouldn’t you protect the innocent? Wouldn’t you fight for your loved ones? What about war in the Old Testament? What about Hitler, or calling

the police, or the centurion that Jesus praised? York and Barringer offer consistently good, often compelling, sometimes provocative or poignant responses. Readers may or may not find them convincing, but at least they unsettle the false peace of unthinking answers.

***Making Peace with the Land: God’s Call to Reconcile with Creation*, by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba** (IVP Books, 182 pp., \$15.00 paperback). Books like this usually threaten us with scarcity. Bahnson and Wirzba beckon us with God’s creative, “abundant kingdom homesteading,” correcting our “reconciliation deficit disorder” by helping us to see that the full scope of divine healing includes all creatures and the whole creation—soil and sea and air, and everything contained and sustained by them.

***Speaking of Dying: Recovering the Church’s Voice in the Face of Death*, by Fred Craddock, Dale Goldsmith and Joy V. Goldsmith** (Brazos, 240 pp., \$19.99 paperback). Dying is hard anywhere, but it is especially difficult in an American church that “has outsourced the work of dying to a secular culture.” This book diagnoses the cultural and ecclesial trends that leave us inarticulate and inept in the face of dying and presents a robust theology that locates our dying in the baptismal story. The authors provide guidelines for speaking to the dying and preaching about dying, and they offer multiple accounts of good and not-so-good deaths.



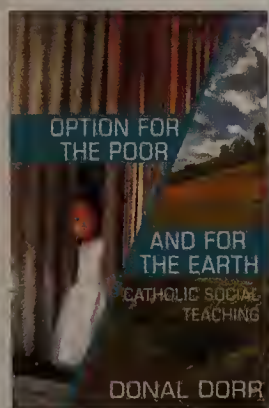
***The Limits of Hospitality*, by Jessica Wroblewski** (Liturgical Press, 184 pp., \$19.95 paperback). Limits on hospitality are not a concession to our finitude, fall-  
 enness or fear; rather, limits provide the boundaries that create a space into which others can be welcomed. Wroblewski expounds this strikingly original argument in relation to spirituality, identity and security, testing her analysis against the seemingly unlimited hospi-

*Selected by D. Brent Laytham, professor of theology and dean of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland.*



tality of Catholic Worker communities, which, although radical, retain limits that are more than practical or inevitable; they are good!

***If These Walls Could Talk: Community Muralism and the Beauty of Justice*, by Maureen O'Connell** (Liturgical Press, 240 pp., \$39.95 paperback). This book taught me that aesthetics can open our eyes to ethics, that beauty can be a catalyst for justice and that the impoverished can give us the gift of rich visions of shalom. O'Connell shows 18 amazing Philadelphia murals (the color prints are glorious!), situates them in thick ethnographic description of their urban environment and analyzes all of this material theologically and morally. She also presents a rich theoretical analysis of muralism as a movement, of aesthetics in relation to ethics and of whiteness and other forms of privilege.



***Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching*, by Donal Dorr** (Orbis, 512 pp., \$38.00 paperback). Dorr introduces readers to Catholic social teaching by thoroughly revising his classic 1992 text (*Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*) and integrating into it 200 new pages. Particularly noteworthy at this time are his treatments of two

of Benedict XVI's encyclicals and of the place of ecological justice throughout the tradition.

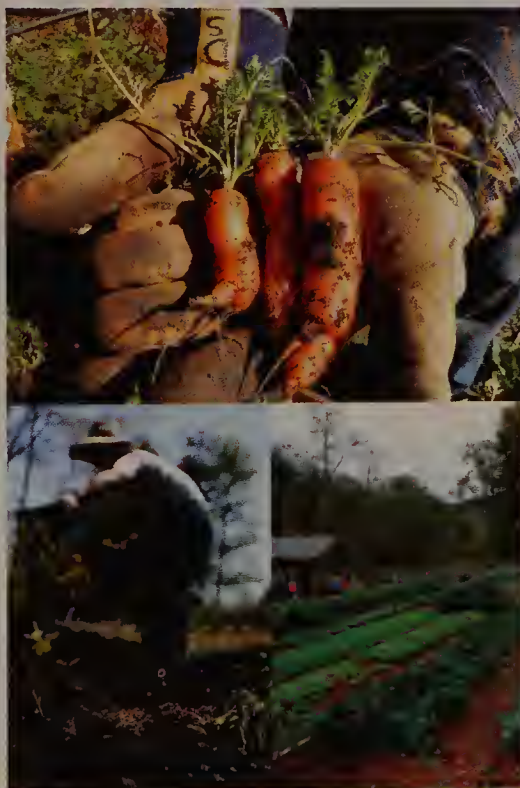
***Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime, and Restorative Justice*, by Christopher D. Marshall** (Cascade, 386 pp., \$42.00 paperback). Reading Jesus' two most memorable parables, those of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, through the lens of criminal victimization and restorative justice, Marshall sets forth a rich feast. His reading simultaneously illumines the meaning and power of Jesus' parables and the urgent necessity of restorative justice. He then steps back to connect compassion and justice, first conceptually and then in the justice system.

***Ethics in the Presence of Christ*, by Christopher R. J. Holmes** (T & T Clark, 176 pp., \$34.95 paperback). Holmes argues that Christian ethics is the human response to the question, What is Jesus doing now? His answer, drawn from the Gospel of John, points to the presence and ongoing ministry of Jesus' power,

truth and love. Holmes rejects exemplarism, the notion that a distant Jesus now dead exemplified principles of right living that we too should adopt. He commends instead a christological realism—the idea that scripture bespeaks a present, acting Jesus who draws us into his own moral performance.

***Shows about Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture*, by Thomas S. Hibbs** (Baylor University Press, 267 pp., \$24.95 paperback). Stories are a form of moral representation and tutelage, as inescapable as they are enjoyable. “Shows”—popular movies and television—are the most prevalent moral stories in our culture and may also be the most powerful. As he uncovers the narrative grammar of pop culture, Hibbs makes a compelling case that many of our most popular and successful shows, from *Pulp Fiction* to *Mad Men*, are ultimately nihilistic. In some shows good is indistinguishable from evil, but in others virtuous resistance is possible.

***The Morally Divided Body: Ethical Disagreement and the Disunity of the Church*, edited by Michael Root and James J. Buckley** (Cascade, 156 pp., \$18.00 paperback). Root and Buckley have gathered thought-provoking explorations of the ethical dimensions of a divided church. Writing from a shared commitment to “rebuilding the divided body,” the contributors convey beautifully that our ethical divisions are inseparable from doctrine.



  
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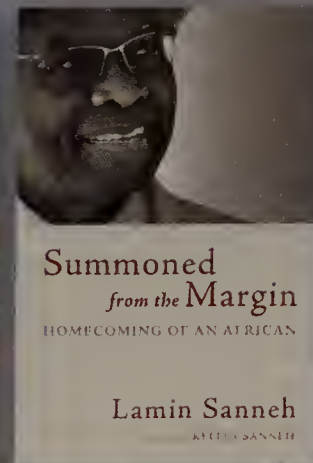
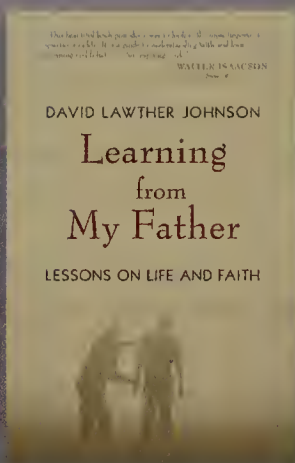
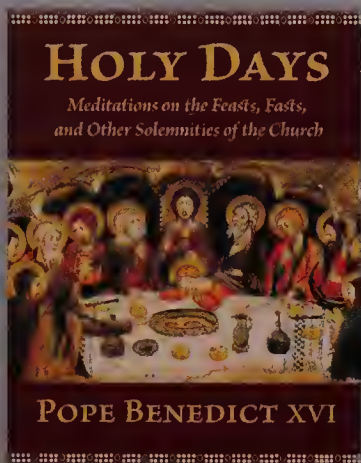
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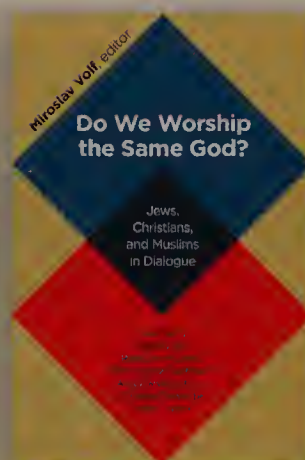
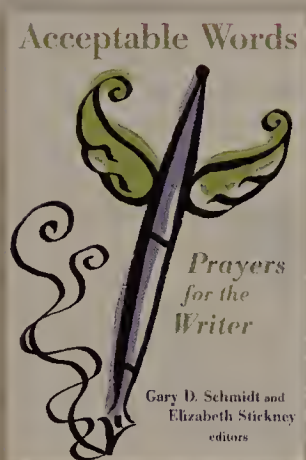
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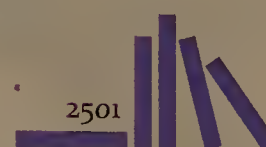
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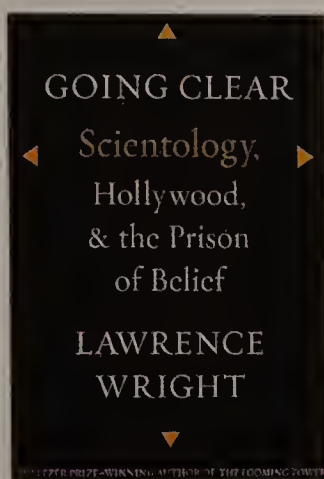
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# SPRING BOOKS

## Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief

By Lawrence Wright  
Knopf, 448 pp., \$28.95



I'm sure it's only a coincidence, but nearly every time I've shoe-horned a brief lecture on Scientology into my survey of religion in North America course—brief because I'm not at all sure it merits being classified as a religion—I've received a phone call or e-mail from some Scientology entity or another offering to send a representative or materials so my students will be properly informed. The last time, I received a large box of CDs and DVDs of what appeared to be every lecture L. Ron Hubbard ever gave. My colleagues received boxes as well.

All of that is to say that I cannot imagine the volume of materials Lawrence Wright sifted through to write *Going Clear*. He clearly needed to be a brave researcher and a gifted writer to understand and explain such recondite notions as thetans and the infamous Sea Org, much less to reconcile Scientology's claim that it adds 4.4 million new members every year with independent estimates that peg the number of Scientologists in the United States at 25,000.

The story of Scientology begins, of course, with Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, the native of Tilden, Nebraska, who created the movement. Wright preemptively dismisses attempts to dismiss Hubbard, arguing "that to label him a pure fraud is to ignore the complex, charming, delusional, and visionary features of his character that made him so compelling to the many thousands who followed him and the millions who read his work." Hubbard fancied himself an adventurer and traveled widely; a long-ago acquaintance of his said that Hubbard "possessed the ego and talents" to "develop his own private religion." One of Hubbard's ex-lovers remarked, "He said he always wanted to found a religion like Moses or Jesus."

Hubbard's epiphanic moment occurred in a dental chair on

New Year's Day 1938. Under a gas anesthetic, he learned the secrets of the universe, which he disclosed in a feverish manuscript, *Excalibur*. "I have high hopes of smashing my name into history so violently that it will take a legendary form even if all the books are destroyed," Hubbard wrote to his wife. The book, however, never saw print. Hubbard claimed that the first six people who read the manuscript lost their minds; another set the manuscript on the desk and then jumped out of a skyscraper.

Hubbard was by then a seasoned science fiction writer, so prolific that he fed rolls of paper through his typewriter so he wouldn't have to stop and reload single sheets. "The broad canvas of science fiction allowed Hubbard to think in large-scale terms about the human condition," Wright comments. "He could easily invent an elaborate, plausible universe. But it is one thing to make that universe believable, and another to believe it. That is the difference between art and religion."

Those who want to assail Hubbard's credibility have plenty to work with. He had multiple marriages and several extramarital affairs, and apparently he was a bigamist for a time. He abused at least one of his wives, and he abducted and eventually disowned one of his daughters. He appears to have fabricated his military service, and he repeatedly sought compensation from the government to which he was not entitled. One of his pleas to the Veterans Administration included Hubbard's statement that a previous physician had "informed me that it might be very helpful if I were to be examined and perhaps treated psychiatrically or even by a psychiatrist." However, "I avoided out of pride any mental examinations, hoping that time would balance a mind which I had every reason to suppose was seriously affected."

Hubbard published *Dianetics* in 1950. Here, Hubbard detailed his insights into the universe and the human soul (which he called the thetan). He invented new words (*enturbulate* and *hatting*) and turned others into nouns (*overt*, *static*)—"all of which would entrap his followers in a self-referential semantic labyrinth." Dianetics therapy, Hubbard promised,

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*Reviewed by Randall Balmer, an Episcopal priest and chair of the religion department at Dartmouth College.*

would readjust painful past experiences, engrams, so the individual could eventually attain the state of "Clear."

Such therapy, however, would not come cheap. Hubbard's E-meter, originally a couple of Campbell's soup cans with the labels removed, became the device with which blockages could be diagnosed—for a fee. Hubbard became the "Source" for Scientology, and set up an elite organization of Scientology clergy, the Sea Organization, or Sea Org. "Not only was he inventing a new religion," Wright notes, "he was also reinventing himself as a religious leader."

As Hubbard began attracting followers, he became an autocrat. Sea Org recruits signed contracts for a "billion years" of service, and they catered to his every whim, including obsessive standards of cleanliness aboard his fleet of ships. Those who displeased him were consigned to "Non-Existence" or "Liability," a plight akin to serfdom—manual labor, no bathing or changing clothes for months, and eating the leftover scraps from Hubbard's sumptuous table out of buckets. Those who displeased Hubbard were thrown overboard as a disciplinary measure, even in rough seas, and then fished out of the water.

In the lexicon of Scientology, anyone blocking a thetan's spiritual progress is a "Suppressive Person," and no one knows the perils of being labeled an "SP" more than Paulette Cooper. Her 1971 exposé, *The Scandal of Scientology*, prompted death threats. Her name and telephone number started to appear on the stalls in men's rooms. One day the author's sister, staying in

Cooper's New York apartment, answered the door to receive a delivery of flowers; the courier pulled out a gun, put it to her temple and pulled the trigger. When the gun failed to fire, he tried to strangle her, but her screams deterred the assailant. When Cooper moved to another apartment building, 300 neighbors received letters saying that Cooper was a prostitute who molested children. A Scientologist complained to the FBI that Cooper had voiced death threats against Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger.

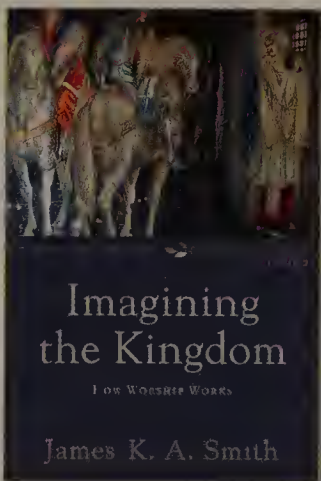
Cooper later learned that she had been the target of Operation Freakout, whose stated goal was to have Cooper "incarcerated in a mental institution or jail."

Hubbard's paranoia, like his grandiosity, knew no bounds. In 1973 he authorized Operation Snow White, an audacious—and remarkably successful—program to infiltrate various government and international agencies, including Interpol and the IRS, to purge any documents germane to Scientology. Wright reports that as many as 5,000 Scientologists infiltrated 136 agencies around the world, in addition to various professional associations and newspapers such as the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Washington Post*.

It is at this point in the narrative that Wright says, "Scientology changed course and sailed toward a darker horizon." Could it get any worse? Yes. The balance of the book chronicles hit-and-run "accidents," slashed tires, mysterious deaths, a dungeon housing 120 people in the basement of

FOR THE STUDY AND RENEWAL OF WORSHIP

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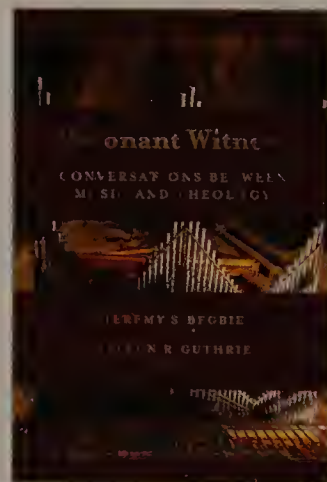
James K.A. Smith

### Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology

Jeremy Begbie & Steven Guthrie, eds.

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Scientology's Advanced Org building in Los Angeles, and abuse at various Scientology sites, including one in La Quinta, California, and its Flag Land Base in Clearwater, Florida. Lisa McPherson had spent \$176,700 on Scientology services, and she had only \$11 in her savings account when she died under suspicious circumstances in 1995. Anyone who tries to leave Scientology is charged with crimes against the group and presented a massive bill for payment of "auditing" services. Scientologists, according to Wright, conduct "blow drills" to capture anyone who tries to flee.

Critics are slapped with lawsuits that have little chance of success but saddle the critic with legal bills and litigation. For example, Scientologists tied the Cult Awareness Network into knots with lawsuits, forcing the group into bankruptcy. A Scientologist purchased the organization's name and assets, and the reorganized group shortly thereafter lauded Scientology for its efforts to "increase happiness and improve conditions for oneself and others."

Scientology's assiduous courting of celebrities allows the movement to offer an attractive face to the public—the smiling, happy faces of people like John Travolta, Kirstie Alley and Tom Cruise, all of whom enjoy the level of pampering bestowed on Hubbard himself. Scientology's antics continued, however, and arguably intensified when David Miscavige succeeded to leadership after Hubbard died in 1986—no, "dropped his body" to move on to a higher level.

The brass ring for Hubbard and for Miscavige was Scientology's classification as a religion by the IRS, which provided both tax exemption and First Amendment protection. Once again the machinations are shrouded in mystery, but the IRS finally abandoned its fight with Scientology and reached a settlement that allowed Scientology to avoid \$1 billion in back taxes and be deemed a religion. A Scientology cross was created, and Church of Scientology ministers began sporting Roman collars.

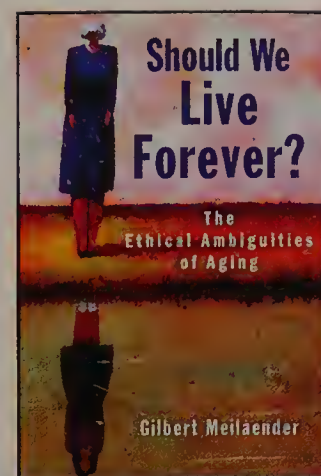
What are we to make of these outrages, and especially of the absence of a public outcry? As Wright points out, the term *cult* has been construed by scholars of religion as pejorative rather than descriptive—and to this I must plead guilty. When someone asks me whether some group or another is a cult, I typically demur that I don't like to use the word *cult* because I've never heard anyone say, "Yes, I'm a member of a cult!" Religion scholars have even invented a new category, "New Religious Movements," to evade that moniker and avoid any hint of judgment.

I wonder, however, if Wright's book, especially because of its lack of bombast and its understated, evenhanded presentation, doesn't demand a reconsideration of that stance. My colleagues and I, both ecclesiastical and academic, have no problem denouncing racism, sexism, homophobia and sexual abuse—and properly so. Perhaps it's time we peek out from behind the ruse of "New Religious Movements" and denounce abuse perpetrated in the name of religion as well.

When Hubbard wrote, in the late 1930s, "I have high hopes of smashing my name into history so violently that it will take a legendary form," he was on that count at least prophetic, although I'd be inclined to substitute *notorious* for *legendary*.

## Should We Live Forever? The Ethical Ambiguities of Aging

By Gilbert Meilaender  
Eerdmans, 135 pp., \$18.00 paperback



By book 10 of his *Confessions*, Augustine has completed the narration of his long, often tortuous spiritual journey from paganism to Christianity. He has not, however, found a resting place. Having gone through a cathartic conversion, Augustine might now be expected to provide his readers with insights into the nature of the Christian faith and the meaning of life. Instead, he acknowledges his continued ignorance and intractable limits: "What then am I, my God? What is my nature?" He concludes that the answers are not found within but only from and in God. "I dive down deep as I can, and I can find no end."

Augustine's narrative serves as an analogy to the journey on which Gilbert Meilaender takes readers in *Should We Live Forever?* A professor of Christian ethics at Valparaiso University in Indiana, Meilaender considers the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the modern technologies that promise to extend our physical existence. With daily developments in the scientific fight to battle aging, we can live longer and longer. There is a day on the horizon—perhaps in the not too distant future—when those with the will and the resources might be able to extend their biological lives indefinitely. Meilaender notes that "we often desire, even greedily desire, longer life" but wonders "whether what we desire is truly desirable." We soon may be able to live much longer lives, but should we pursue such a goal?

Meilaender does not ask this question from a position of fear; he does not oppose science and modern medical advances. Indeed, he served for almost a decade on the President's Council on Bioethics and recently received a grant from the Templeton Foundation to study the implications of antiaging research as part of the University of Chicago's New Science of Virtues project. He believes that we should try to eradicate disease. But does this mean we should also try to eradicate aging?

Meilaender's path to an answer is not a linear one. He does not provide a logician's argument in opposition to technological efforts to extend life indefinitely. Instead, the volume emerges as a meditation on life and mortality, circling around certain themes from multiple perspectives and relying on the insights of poets and novelists as often as the arguments of medical researchers.

Meilaender turns to analogies of banquets and flower arranging, for instance, to develop the point that life is meant to have a narrative shape—a beginning, a middle and an end. He writes, "One very old way of depicting that shape is to picture life as a banquet, with a succession of courses through which

*Reviewed by Timothy Renick, professor of religious studies and vice provost at Georgia State University in Atlanta.*



one proceeded—and also . . . having a stopping point beyond which the banquet cannot be prolonged without destroying its pleasure.” And there is beauty in the later years of life. Meilaender quotes Daniel Callahan: “An imaginative flower arranger . . . said that the secret lies in learning how to work with the material at hand, not longing for flowers not available. He then demonstrated what he meant by fashioning a wonderful arrangement from roadside weeds.” For Meilaender, we are enriched by the aging process, even by aspects that some people consider problematic. To deny aging is to deny something that is essentially human.

But some essential aspects of humanity are incompatible with the goal of living indefinitely. Meilaender develops the concept of generativity: the “human virtue that makes us ready, even eager, to produce those who will replace us and to sacrifice ourselves on their behalf.” It is for good reason that humans’ generative nature has been the focus of centuries of discourse, from ancient myths and scripture to modern novels and movies.

What would happen if the natural succession of human generations were to cease? What would be the implications of living indefinitely for family roles, the relationship between old and young, and the promise offered by those who are yet to come? “Whatever the gain might be of retarding aging and extending life indefinitely,” Meilaender concludes, “doing so could undermine the relation between the generations that shapes and defines so much of our lives.”

Precisely because of our mortality and our lack of control over it, we are able to develop virtues such as dependence on God and patience as we wait for God to deliver us from this life. These virtues could be lost in a world in which we define the time of our own exit, scheduling death on the basis of individual will and personal resources.

The common premise of Meilaender’s various arguments is that our lives are leading to something more important than the here and now; that there is something to be patient for; that we can have faith in the Christian promise that there is something greater than this world. As Meilaender writes:

We are characterized by a thirst that can be quenched neither by making our peace with the beauty and pathos of the limits of organic life nor by continual progress in the improvement and extension of our lives. We are . . . drawn out of ourselves toward God, and satisfaction of that longing could not possibly come from more of this life, however long extended.

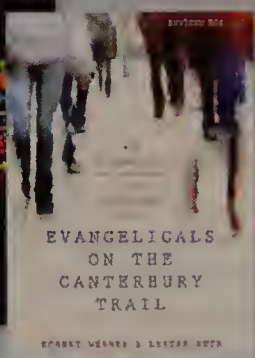
Meilaender argues that the essence of human life is found in a multistage process that has not only a beginning and a middle but also a worldly end. Like Augustine before him, he holds that this human journey, no matter how long it is extended on this planet, can never be complete until it finds rest in God.

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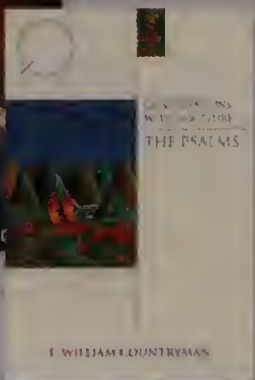
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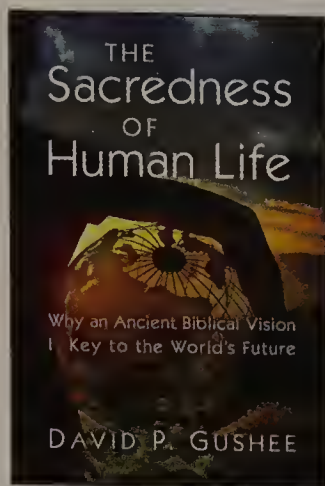
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## The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision Is Key to the World's Future

By David P. Gushee  
Eerdmans, 477 pp., \$35.00

David Gushee's attempt to define and defend the concept of the sacredness of life is a welcome reminder of why it is so important that we not take for granted the protections that surround our lives and the lives of others. In this sprawling book, he discusses extensively subjects as wide ranging as the Crusades, colonialism, Christian anti-Semitism, Locke, Kant, Nietzsche and Nazi Germany, as well as contemporary issues such as abortion,



capital punishment and the status of rights that may seem only indirectly related to the main subject of the book. The breadth of the book is not accidental but reflects the fundamental argument at its heart: that our sense that life is sacred is a historical achievement that must be sustained by the memory of a people.

Gushee argues that the discovery that human life is sacred is rooted in the history of God's dealings with Israel. He does not contend that our belief that every life is to be regarded as precious is based exclusively on the Old Testament but that in the Old Testament we find its surest grounds. Appeals to natural law may sometimes provide a defense of the sacredness of life, but Gushee thinks that such sources of our reverence for

*Reviewed by Stanley Hauerwas, who teaches theological ethics at Duke University and recently wrote War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity (Baker Academic).*

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**WE WONDERED** what kind of reading ministers rely on for inspiration or help in preaching—apart from reading commentaries on scripture or other materials directly related to the task. Do they draw on certain authors of fiction or nonfiction? Are they influenced by essays, poetry, magazines or children's literature? Here are some reflections:

Putting together words that can break through the sea—sometimes the cesspool—of words in which we live seems a Sisyphean task. I look for help wherever I can get it, so I read.

I read the print edition of the *New York Times* daily. I encounter news of events, places, people and cultural developments I wouldn't have known about otherwise. I read the *New Yorker*, either in print or with its fine iPad app. Stories and vignettes from both these publications often end up in sermons, not because I am looking for material but because they are on my mind as I prepare. The *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* is indispensable. Both the *Times* and the *CENTURY* curate my reading list.

I am an avid reader of nonfiction, both popular works in history, science and economics, such as Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, and heavier works in theology. The former help me appreciate and understand context, the latter excite me about God and hopefully give my preaching some theological depth. A favorite repeat is David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*, with prose I find compelling and passionate. Hart's work with aesthetics helps me preach with an ear for the sensory and not just the cognitive. Marilynne Robinson and Walter Brueggemann also excite my imagination as a preacher.

I have been wading through Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*

for years and find it a wonderful guidebook for preaching in these times. Paul Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil* is a favorite interpretive framework I return to often, which reminds me just how astonishing the gospel is. My favorite preaching is done by preachers who are always astonished by the gospel. When I do read fiction it is often in the form of thick, grand, immersing books that take me weeks to complete and are demanding on my imagination. Recent notables include the first two books in Hilary Mantel's Wolf Hall trilogy.

—**Phil Waite**, pastoral team leader at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana

When I'm working on a sermon, I like to have wise women nearby. My favorite is the poet Nikki Giovanni, who tells it like it is. Her books, especially *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*, have helped me preach hard sermons about choices, love—and Rosa Parks's thoughts on a Montgomery bus. Giovanni is brave and vulnerable all at once, and she inspires me to preach the same way.

Author Alice Walker, as well, has seen great success and loss. In her writings she is angry and hopeful at the same time—the warring qualities of a prophet. I look often at *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth*, a collection of her poetry.

Finally, I frequently turn to *My Soul Is a Witness: African-American Women's Spirituality*, edited by Gloria Wade-Gayles. It's an amazing treasury of speeches, stories, poems and essays by women like Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Sojourner Truth. I've planned not just sermons but whole worship services using the writings inside; and whenever I come back to it, there's something new to discover.

Having the words of these women near is like being a little girl again, listening to grown folks' conversations from outside the kitchen. They may not know I am listening, but their words make me wiser.

—**Ayanna Johnson**, director of community life at Chicago Theological Seminary



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life themselves emerged from a synthesis of biblical and classical sources.

Gushee begins by attempting to define what the sacredness of life means. But it is not clear to me whether *definition* is the right word to describe what Gushee does, which is basically to provide a conceptual analysis of what sacredness of life must mean given how that concept is used in common human practices. He asserts that sacredness of life means that every human life possesses dignity that demands reverence.

That analytical definition provides the resources that Gushee uses to give a "Christian definition" of what it means to say human life is sacred. According to Gushee, the Christian understanding of the sacred character of human life means that

God has consecrated each and every human being—without exception and in all circumstances—as a unique, incalculably precious being of elevated status and dignity. Through God's revelation in Scripture and incarnation in Jesus Christ, God has declared and demonstrated the sacred worth of human beings and will hold us accountable for responding appropriately.

Gushee avoids any suggestion that such a definition is begging the question by listing what he identifies as 17 puzzles it produces. For example, he asks: Is the individual or the community the subject of such regard? Another puzzle is centered on the question of what makes human life so precious. He also asks: Can a human being behave in such a manner as to lose sacredness? In the process of exploring these puzzles, Gushee seeks to provide an adequate defense of life's sacredness.

He begins, as one would expect, with the beginning, arguing that our sense that human life is sacred reflects the presumption that we have been created in the image of God. God's compassionate care for human life, the covenant and the giving of the law, and the prophetic vision of human wholeness are further developments that make the Old Testament the source for the sense that human life is to be protected. Gushee



quite rightly, I think, refuses to identify some characteristics of humans, such as rationality, as the grounds for human sacredness. It is sufficient to recognize that God has regarded humans as sacred. This means that our sacredness is not our possession but rather is conferred by God.

The coming of Jesus as the Christ, as a human being, confirms and extends the way human life was held sacred in the Old Testament. Christianity granted to all people the presumption that every human life is of equal value. The sad fact of Christians' failure to live up to their own convictions concerning the sacred character of each human life does not mean that reverence for life has been lost. Gushee argues that a conviction that humans are sacred was in the early Christian DNA, as is evident in Christians' refusal of war, condemnation of abortion and criticism of the Romans' games of brutality.

What happened to cause Christians to qualify their commitment to the sacred character of human life? Gushee's short answer is Christendom, which began with the late Roman Empire, was transmuted into European states, then was extended through colonization. Gushee is well aware that such an explanation of what happened can be far too simplistic, but he provides case studies of the Crusades, colonialism and anti-Semitism as examples of what happens when Christians assume that it is their task to rule. No doubt this aspect of his book will prove to be the most controversial, but I hope readers will not dismiss out of hand his suggestion that Christian fear of Jews may be the source of some of the most negative characteristics of these developments.

Gushee contends that the Enlightenment was a response to Christians' failure to live true to their deepest conviction that every human life is a reflection of God's regard for each one of us. Human dignity and the correlative understanding of rights became the expression, inadequate to be sure, of the Christian conviction that human life is sacred. Gushee provides sympathetic accounts of Locke's and Kant's attempts to provide alternative philosophical arguments to sustain their inheritance of the Christian

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## TEXTS FOR PREACHING



For the first year or two of my preaching life, I lived in a constant state of low-grade panic. Those Sunday morning deadlines were inflexible and unrelenting. In my hustle to prepare sermon manuscripts, I often read indiscriminately, scrambling to find anecdotes to fill anecdote-shaped holes in my sermons. It was a terrible way to work, and it felt uncomfortably removed from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I gradually realized that beyond basic biblical commentaries, there was nothing I could read in the midst of sermon-writing that could help me. Even great works of theology and literature were reduced to crude utility if I approached them seeking to harvest material. I learned instead to trust that I brought enough to the sermon. I didn't have to ransack my library; the best books I've read stay with me.

I am haunted most vividly by the words of Eugene Peterson and Debbie Blue, of Marilynne Robinson and Anne Lamott. It's a predictable pantheon; yes, the next name on the list is Barbara Brown Taylor. These are nevertheless the authors who have taught me to speak about the Word. I do quote them on occasion, but more significantly, I preach with an accent I picked up from their classic writings.

—*Katherine Willis Pershey, associate pastor of the First Congregational Church in Western Springs, Illinois*

I read theology to understand myself and be reminded that I cannot ever hope to understand God. I get my deep meaning from reading dead Germans. Most everything else is entertainment. But it all affects my preaching. Whatever book is on my nightstand follows me into the pulpit. I enjoy crime novels and hope their narrative drive and sense of urgency helps keep my sermons focused and lean. Two of my favorite authors in the genre are Raymond Chandler and James Ellroy. They can both be brutal. I suspect that steady exposure to such nastiness has helped contain or corral my own impulse to preach too sweetly. When I was younger I read Raymond Carver nonstop. While his "theological anthropology" is far too bleak to be of use in the pulpit, his technique is invaluable. Not a word is wasted.

But garrulous writers are also helpful. I try to be humorous, and I've learned how to write a sideways joke from two of the masters. I love Charles Portis and P. G. Wodehouse. Sam Lipsyte also makes me laugh out loud. But I always come back to Portis. His deadpan ridiculousness seems tailor-made for the pulpit.

These days I'm pressed for time. Most novels ask for too much. So I've turned to essays. My favorite contemporary essayist is John Jeremiah Sullivan. He has a gift for using himself while keeping the focus on his subject matter. Watching him strike that balance is terrific instruction as I stand in the pulpit and try to point toward the cross. Sullivan writes with an honesty and clarity that I aspire to. James Wood calls him a "fierce noticer." Sullivan himself says he is over his "Jesus phase," but his essay "Upon This Rock" is the best piece of spiritual writing I've read in years.

Finally, poetry: I am a latecomer to poems, but I have a convert's zeal. Poems are often baffling. Even as they reveal truth they mystify. And poems do this with such economy of language. Most of my sermons could be shorter. Poetry has taught me this. The contemporary poets who move me the most are Kay Ryan and Seamus Heaney. Both of them say so much so quickly. Sometimes they are crystal clear, sometimes they are impenetrable. To me this feels like preaching. Some Sundays the electricity shows up. Some Sundays God is silent. Who knows what will happen? In this regard, the words of some poets seem to echo the Word of God. Unlike a good crime novel, good poetry isn't easy. But it is quick to read and gives so much while gesturing toward so much more.

—*Matt Fitzgerald, senior pastor at Saint Paul's United Church of Christ in Chicago*



commitment to life, but he also astutely shows how their positions could be used to deny the value of each human life. I would have welcomed an engagement with George Kateb's recent book *Human Dignity* as a way to test his argument.

In an extended treatment of Nietzsche, Gushee suggests that the kind of humanistic defense of the sacredness of life that is associated with the Enlightenment was open to challenges that it could not meet on its own terms. That challenge was made all too real when the Nazis ruled Germany and the world became unwilling witness to a social and political reality that had no regard for the sacredness of life. Gushee is not suggesting that Nazi Germany is the result of the Enlightenment's inadequate defense of human life; rather, he is trying to help us see why it is so important that we not lose the significance of God's care for human life.

Oddly enough, I found Gushee's treatment of contemporary challenges to the honoring of human life—abortion, biotechnological innovations, capital punishment, nuclear weapons, women's rights—one of the least successful parts of his book. In Gushee's defense, to adequately deal with each of those topics would require another book, but I also wonder whether one of the reasons he seems less decisive about these matters is that the concept of the sacredness of life fails to provide sufficient resources to address these issues. The same point might well be made about his treatment of the care of all creation. He is careful to avoid making all crea-

turely life less valuable than human life, but I suspect he would only claim to have identified the problem of how the proper regard of human life cannot be separated from all life.

This brings me back to the historical character of Gushee's argument. I have no reason to think that this kind of methodology is inherently mistaken, but I do suspect, given the historical character of the argument, that the focus on the sacredness of life is too singular. While I was reading Gushee's account of early Christian attitudes toward war, abortion, and the slaughter in the Roman arenas, I often thought that the issue was not only the violation of life but a network of practices that gained their intelligibility from the worship of God. That is not telling Gushee anything he does not know, but I wish he had been able to show the difference that helps us to better understand why Christians refuse the use of violence to "do good."

In reading this book one has a sense that Gushee has poured himself into it. In the introduction he notes that the volume was originally intended to be part of a bioethics series, but he became convinced that the sacredness of human life is about more than abortion or euthanasia. I am sure he is right about that. I am equally sure that we should be grateful for this thoughtful book in which Gushee reminds us that as Christians we dare not forget that God has sanctified every human life.

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**The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom**  
By Candida Moss  
HarperOne, 320 pp., \$25.99

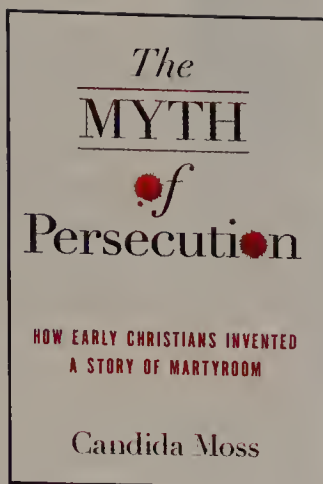
Candida Moss unravels a common misperception: that Christianity faced murderous government-sanctioned persecution for its first three centuries, a period in which “the blood of the martyrs” supplied seed for the growing church. Grounded in ten years of research on martyr traditions, Moss’s basic position will surprise few historians. Though early Christian texts assign martyrdom a constitutive role in the church’s story, non-Christian sources refuse to corroborate this picture.

But beyond this common observation, Moss has much more to say: early Christians rarely experienced the sort of suppression we have imagined. Even our most reliable martyrdom stories, which Christian authors deployed in the service of various later causes, betray significant degrees of elaboration and anachronism. And many of the martyrdom accounts amount to pure, albeit pious, fiction.

Like the ancient poets, Moss at once instructs and entertains. Admirably weaving clear argumentation into vivid narration and demonstrating authoritative command of the primary sources, Moss advances her case by means of several important arguments. She also transgresses the boundary between historian and theologian and calls the church to repentance. She contends that the martyrdom narrative poses grave dangers, having contributed to everything from mild alienation to outright atrocity throughout the church’s history.

Moss requires readers to accept two major qualifications. First, we need a precise definition of martyrdom. Vague harassment, however annoying or hostile, hardly counts. Nor does death by suicide or in combat. Even when Christians die as a result of their convictions, it counts as martyrdom only when the killers are motivated to crush or punish Christian belief. In this sense Oscar Romero is not a martyr. His Christian vocation surely led to his death, but his assassination was more political than religious. Second, though Moss does not deny that quite a few early Christians suffered martyrdom, her interest lies in official, state-sponsored suppression of Christianity, a condition she identifies on only a few occasions in ancient history, none of which continued for a long period of time.

A certain relentlessness characterizes Moss’s presenta-



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In addition to the biblical text, the most important material for me tends to come from our context and from what I discern in the lives, community and world around us. Other than scripture, the writing I refer to and quote most frequently would be printed and online news sources. Because I live in New York City, I often turn to the *New York Times*, the *Daily News* and *El Diario*. Recently I have found helpful material in the *Huffington Post*.

I tend to think and preach in images, so I look for one particular image in a news story that becomes a window into the larger story. I try to find something that carries an emotional impact that connects with me and that I believe will connect with others.

Beyond the current news, I sometimes draw on prophetic writings and poetry. Because of the racial and ethnic diversity of my congregation, I try to highlight African-American and Latino voices. Examples I have drawn upon repeatedly are Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Julia Esquivel, Maya Angelou and Elie Wiesel. I also use some of the Hasidic tales collected by Martin Buber.

—Heidi Neumark, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in New York City

Life is a sermon. Whenever I grab my pen and legal pad, I view myself as a chronicler of the beauty, tragedy, humor, anxiety and ultimate hope that characterize the Christian life. There is a wide range of regular sources for inspiration and example. Aretha Franklin’s 1972 album *Amazing Grace* articulates the pathos of the gospel narrative with simple clarity yet profound conviction. Historian Jill Lepore’s column in the *New Yorker* illuminates the complicated histories that structure some of today’s most pressing political and moral issues such as the Tea Party and gun control. Ambrose Bierce’s *The Devil’s Dictionary* lampoons life’s ironies and the American penchant for delusions of grandeur. Definitions such as “adherent, n. A follower who has not yet obtained all he expects to get” reveal that satire remains an entertaining and effective form of social criticism.

Yet the writings of Martin Luther King Jr. and James Baldwin are my most consistent conversation partners. When I think of King in relation to other great preachers, I am reminded of Cicero and Demosthenes. It is said that when the former finished speaking, the people remarked on how well he spoke. When the latter finished, however, the masses cried, “Let us march.” King’s trenchant social analysis was smart though never pedantic. And his rhetoric was familiar but never platitudinous. This is always my goal. Finally, Baldwin was America’s Socratic prophet. The former boy preacher was the master of the first-person narrative concerned with the larger society. Evil, joy, sin and redemption are never in the exclusive possession of someone else, as, for Baldwin, our humanity is ever before us. It is this sort of self-criticism, unapologetic candor and social critique found in Baldwin’s writings that inspires me as a social ethicist and preacher.

—Jonathan L. Walton, Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church, Harvard University

Reviewed by Greg Carey, who teaches New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary and serves as resident scholar at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



tion. She begins by dismantling romantic assumptions about Christian martyrs. Yes, Christians were the first to employ the Greek word *martyrs* to denote those who are killed for their faith. But no, Christians were not the first martyrs. With precision Moss shows how early Christian accounts of martyrdom drew on antecedents in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature. Socrates and the Maccabean martyrs, among others, provided models for many Christian martyrdom narratives.

Moss then turns to the Christian martyr accounts themselves. Her longest chapter amounts to a thorough unraveling of the martyrdom myth. Turning from one example to another, she unpeels layers of conventional plot devices, historical anachronisms and legal impossibilities. Some plot developments are “Christian equivalents of a heroine opening the basement door in a horror movie.”

Moss identifies only six “authentic” martyrdom accounts from the earliest church, and it turns out that even these narratives “have been edited and shaped by later generations of Christians,” for a variety of ends. Typically they reflect doctrinal or ecclesial controversies that preoccupied Christians centuries after the deaths of their subjects. Hundreds of other martyrdom narratives boil down to pure fiction.

If the martyrdom accounts pose historical problems, what about the big picture? Should we imagine ancient “Christians huddled together in catacombs . . . and living in fear”? Not often, says Moss. She identifies four periods in which the

Roman government sought and killed Christians: Nero’s persecution in 64, the Decian persecution of 250, a brief persecution under Valerian in 257–258 and the “Great Persecutions” of 303–305 and 311–313. Not only do these add up to a relatively brief period of time, some of the events were regional in effect, and not all of them qualify precisely as persecutions.

For example, ancient Christians surely regarded Decius as evil, but his edict that all persons must sacrifice to the genius of the emperor aimed to solidify a shaky political situation rather than target Christians as Christians. Moreover, the accounts of these persecutions often indicate the high social status of the martyrs, status that could not have been achieved in a context defined by ongoing, violent repression.

On this point Moss walks a fine line, perhaps opening herself to criticism. She recognizes that even the earliest Christian literature reflects intense concern with persecution. She acknowledges that we need not regard the authors of Revelation and 1 Peter as hysterical in their concern with persecution and agrees that some Christians died gruesome deaths. But she points out that these testimonies “do not line up with either the mythology of Christian persecution or modern definitions of persecution in which persecution is centralized or state-led.” Nor may we trust the protests of Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Eusebius that Christians were “everywhere and always persecuted, when, in fact, they were not.”

At this point one wonders whether Moss has so defined martyrdom and persecution as to render her findings inevitable. Those of us who specialize in the earliest Christian documents acknowledge that we lack objective evidence to confirm widespread official persecution. We also observe the ubiquity of persecution anxiety from the Gospels to Paul to Peter to Revelation to *Hermas* to the *Ascension of Isaiah* to the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

Let us concede that just a few instances of repression and only a very few martyrdoms are necessary to create a culture of fear and resentment. Nevertheless, Moss’s choice to speak only of official persecution diverts us from considering the kinds of local, sporadic and unofficial persecution our most ancient texts suggest. I am eager to hear her assessment of this problem.

Moss acknowledges the presence of widespread hostility toward Christians in antiquity, but Christians were not the only group that faced occasional repression. By and large, the Romans were interested not in Christian religion but in loyalty. On the one hand, Christians did not support the religious economy through which people curried favor with the gods; on the other hand, Christians’

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refusal to honor the emperor smacked of sedition. Christians also formed suspiciously close communities. In Roman courts their conduct came across as disrespectful and rude. Moss correctly assesses the situation: "The Romans rarely persecuted Christians, and when they did, they had logical reasons that made sense to any ancient Roman."

As Moss wraps up her case, she examines the motives of Christian martyrs and of those who told their stories. The picture is not particularly flattering. We commonly imagine Christians facing arrest, then bravely enduring torture for the sake of their testimony. But what about those who volunteered for death, perhaps because they were suicidal? What about those who regarded their testimony as a weapon against their persecutors, or those who anticipated the day in which they would watch their tormentors endure divine wrath? How noble is a person who dies in search of a great heavenly reward?

As for the storytellers, martyrdom stories flourished not when persecution raged but during periods of relative peace. The accounts fill the martyrs' mouths with praise for the bishops and invective against heretics. They use the martyrs' stories to promote shrines and cities. "We are teetering precariously," Moss alerts us, "on the cusp of crude plagiarism and fanciful invention."

Moss concludes in the voice of a pastoral theologian. The martyrdom accounts may inculcate certain virtues, but they also bear a dangerous legacy. These stories set "us" Christians against the world, and they align the world with Satan. To the degree that the martyrdom myth shapes Christian imagination, it requires no great rhetorical leap to label theological, religious and political opponents in demonic terms. Martyrs were soldiers for Christ; they died not because they were pacifists but because they lacked real weapons. With real weapons in their hands, martyr-inspired Christians turn into merciless killers.

At a minimum, the martyrdom myth encourages true believers to dismiss their opponents and their opponents' humanity, creating obstacles to understanding, compromise and common endeavor. Here historiography meets real life, as Moss's exposure of the martyrdom myth opens a path to a new way of seeing the world and our neighbors.

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## TEXTS FOR PREACHING

At this point in my preaching journey, I find myself drawing on or being informed by the writings of theologian Howard Thurman, novelist Toni Morrison and poet Langston Hughes, as well as the musical literature known as the spirituals. Thurman's meditations and spiritual writings reveal the interface of the human spirit and Holy Spirit and help me stay connected to what is human and Holy; this is important because preaching happens at a human and divine intersection. Morrison's literature reminds me of the raw history of human suffering, particularly of black peoples', yet she paints a picture of the broad human need to which preaching is to minister.

Preaching should also point beyond the human need and condition and envision God's future present world. This is where the poetry of Hughes is enlightening, especially his poems about dreaming. He leads me to "hold fast to dreams" and view preaching as a venue for dreaming God's dreams and proclaiming the "oughtness" of life and not just the "isness." Furthermore, music is important to my preaching. In particular, spirituals (in)form my proclamation. Though they stem from the particular historical context of slavery, they have universal relevance. In them, we find the themes of life—suffering, hope, lament, joy, struggle, anger, questioning and faith—in relationship to God. They remind me of the state of humanity and reveal that preaching is a matter of life and death. In addition, they reinforce the musical nature of preaching such that I may even sing an excerpt of a spiritual or a hymn during, before or after a sermon. Music helps me express ideas, feelings and moods that regular speech cannot do. Sometimes a melody can say more than a word.

—**Luke A. Powery**, dean of the chapel and associate professor of the practice of homiletics at Duke University

One night recently I was reading to my children a book about songbirds. There we discovered one of the most beautiful things in the world: a brood patch. When songbirds get ready to have babies, the feathers on their tummies get loose and fall out. The result is a brood patch, an oval of bare skin on the underside of the bird. It turns out that those tummy feathers, otherwise used to keep the bird's body heat in, become a barrier that keeps that heat away from their young. And so, during breeding season, to better to conduct warmth to speckled eggs and then to newborns, songbirds develop a brood patch.

They lose their feathers for the sake of intimacy and new life: "O Jerusalem, how often I long to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, as a songbird gathers her eggs under her warm bare belly."

Children's books that explore science and nature are constant fodder for sermons in our household, as is children's poetry. I once wrote an entire sermon after reading "Instructions Found After the Flood," by children's poet laureate J. Patrick Lewis: "Let the jungles whisper jaguar, whose paw is velvet. / Let the worm explore the globe, his apple. / Let the spider embroider the air."

Similarly, accessible poets attuned to the natural world, and to the moments and gestures of ordinary life, season my preaching imagination: Ted Kooser, Mary Oliver and Billy Collins, to name a few.

Jaguars, worms, children's literature, giraffes, spiders, poetry, songbirds, the way in which the chickens in our backyard rotate their eggs 50 times a day to regulate the temperature—these are the texts I turn to for inspiration as I prepare to break open God's Word that is constantly being made flesh.

—**Elizabeth Myer Boulton**, creative director of SALT, a not-for-profit project dedicated to reclaiming and sharing the beauty of Christian life through film, photography, music, poetry and ideas



## The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution That Transformed the South

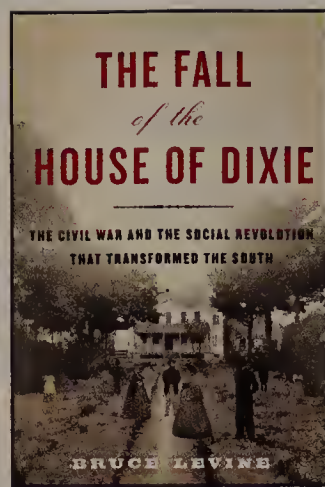
By Bruce Levine

Random House, 464 pp., \$30.00

Bruce Levine begins this compelling book with a prologue recounting Edgar Allan Poe's famous story "The Fall of the House of Usher," setting up an elaborate metaphor for the demise of antebellum southern society through the unintentional revolution wrought by the Civil War.

With chapter titles such as "Securing the Mansion," "Cracks in the Walls Widen," "A Ray of Light Shines Briefly through the Rafters" and "And the Walls Gave Way," Levine uses the "Usher" analogy to suggest that white southern slave owners "resided in an imposing and outwardly sturdy structure" that even before the war "was already beginning to display deep fissures running through it"—fissures that "would widen" during the war "until the whole structure fell."

*The Fall of the House of Dixie* fuses various strands of Civil



War historiography. For the past generation, scholars have debated the question of who freed the slaves, and the traditional answer—Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Union Army—has been challenged by those who argue for a self-emancipation thesis, suggesting that the slaves' own actions during the war produced the conditions under which reluctant Union policy makers had no choice but to press for freedom. Levine deftly weaves together these explanations, showing how they are all connected.

Slaves "refugeed" themselves whenever they had the opportunity, which was usually when the Union Army was in the vicinity. Even when they could not escape, they found ways to work as spies for Union commanders or to malingering and otherwise disrupt southern cotton production on the home front. The actions of African Americans, slave and free, during the war undermined the foundation of the House of Dixie, because, of course, African Americans were that foundation. Moreover, what Frederick Douglass called the "inexorable logic of events" forced Union policy makers, particularly Lincoln, to go far beyond what they had originally intended to pursue a "violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle" against the slaveholders' republic.

Another strength of the book is Levine's excellent discussion of internal fissures within the House of Dixie that went mostly unnoticed until wartime pressures and stresses

exposed them so vividly. The Civil War unleashed class conflict within the South, particularly between wealthier and poorer whites and between slave owners and nonowners of slaves, that at times exploded in the face of Confederate policy makers. The most famous instance was the Richmond Bread Riot of April 1863, when Jefferson Davis forcibly suppressed women who were breaking into food stores to acquire increasingly unaffordable basic necessities.

As the war progressed, the Confederate government found it increasingly necessary to resort to measures that seemed to many white southerners tyrannical and that certainly defied the political philosophy of local control and weak central authority that white southern political philosophers espoused. For example, under the policy of impressment, Confederate officials impressed goods from individuals, "paying" them sometimes less than what the market would bear—and in Confederate scrip that had little value. Even worse was the "20-negro law," according to which men on

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*Reviewed by Paul Harvey, who teaches American history at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and is author most recently of Moses, Jesus, and the Trickster in the Evangelical South (University of Georgia Press).*



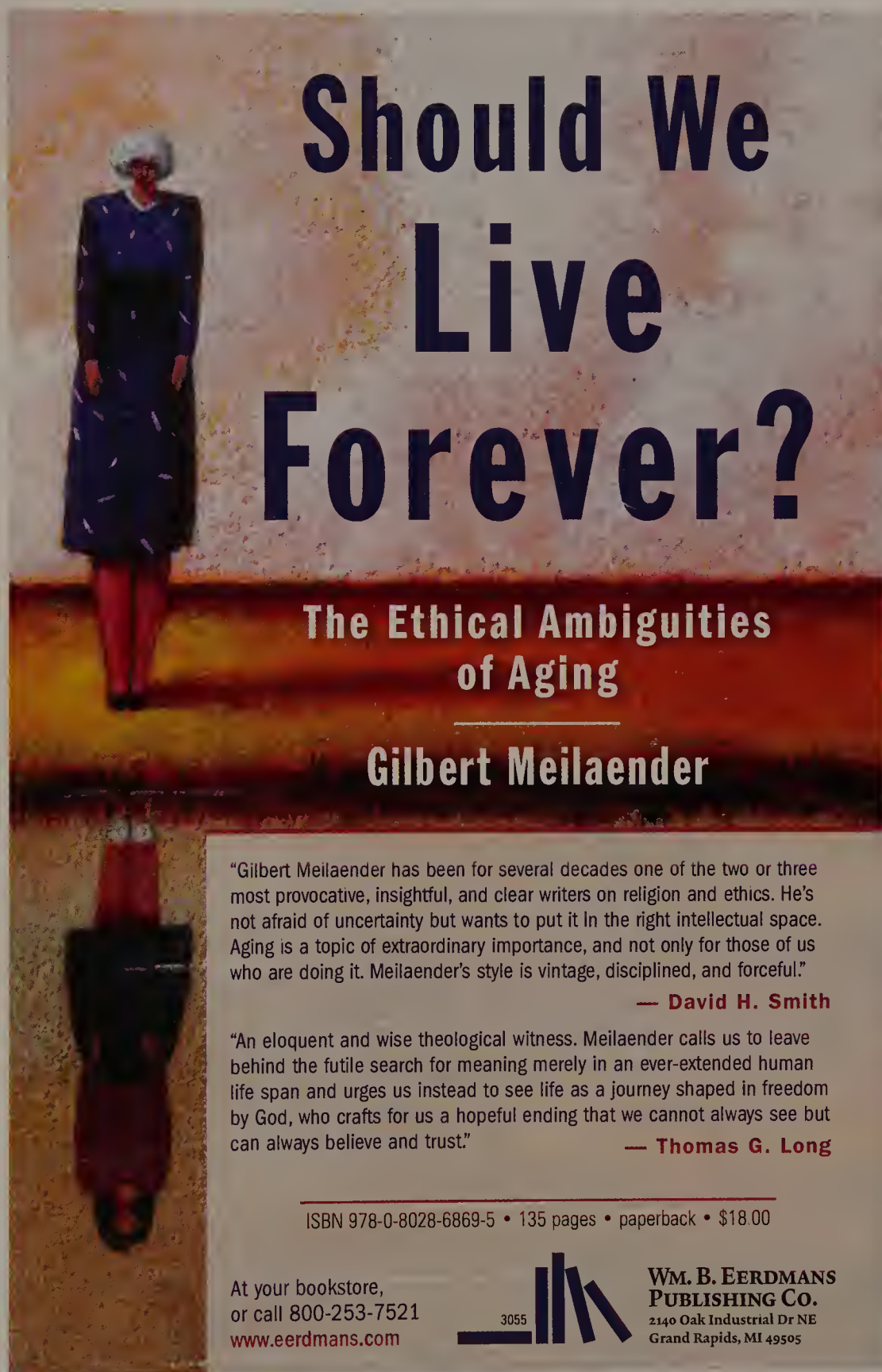
plantations with over 20 slaves were exempt from conscription into the army. The length of the war and the frailty of the undermanned Confederate armies meant that ordinary Confederate soldiers and, even more, ordinary whites on the home front increasingly came to see the conflict as a rich man's war, but a poor man's fight.

Religion during the war receives less attention in the text than I would have preferred; for a fuller recent exposition, I recommend George Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*. That being said, one character Levine follows throughout is Charles Colcock Jones, a Presbyterian minister famously called "apostle to the slaves" for his advocacy of conscious efforts to bring slaves to Christianity. Like many slaveowners, Jones held the public position early in the war that slaves would remain loyal, even as he and his neighbors desired "such a military force as will be sufficient to keep our colored population under supervision and control." Jones's efforts to practice the paternalist ethos consistently ran up against the coercion and violence underpinning the slave regime. One catechism used among slaves, for example, asked, "What did God make you for?" The approved response: "To make a crop."

Little wonder that African-American Christians saw through the veneer of planter paternalism to the message of freedom articulated by their own religious leaders, often in secret. And little wonder, too, that when slavery's demise came, the cracks in the walls of the House of Dixie revealed the deep fissures that had been there all along. Even as Jefferson Davis, attending Sabbath services at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, got word that Richmond must be evacuated and began making preparations, slave dealer Robert Lumpkin desperately and unsuccessfully sought access to one of the last trains out of the city for himself and 50 shackled black people he had for sale.

And when the end of the war came, little wonder that after Jones died, his wife, Mary, was glad to be rid of Negro servants. "I shall cease my anxieties for the race," she wrote to her children at the close of the war. "My life long I have been laboring and caring for them, . . . and this is their return. . . . I am thoroughly disgusted with the whole race. . . . My heart sickens at a prospect of dwelling with them."

Mary might have been cheered by the reimposition of a white supremacist order in years after the war and by the fact that even Lincoln displayed "little interest in fundamentally changing the pattern of land ownership." And yet to reduce the story to "the more things change, the more they stay the same" is too simple. As W. E. B. DuBois wrote, the move back toward slavery in the late 19th century was not a move into slavery, and the fact that slavery was no longer a possibility was a sign of the revolutionary story contained in the fall of the House of Dixie.



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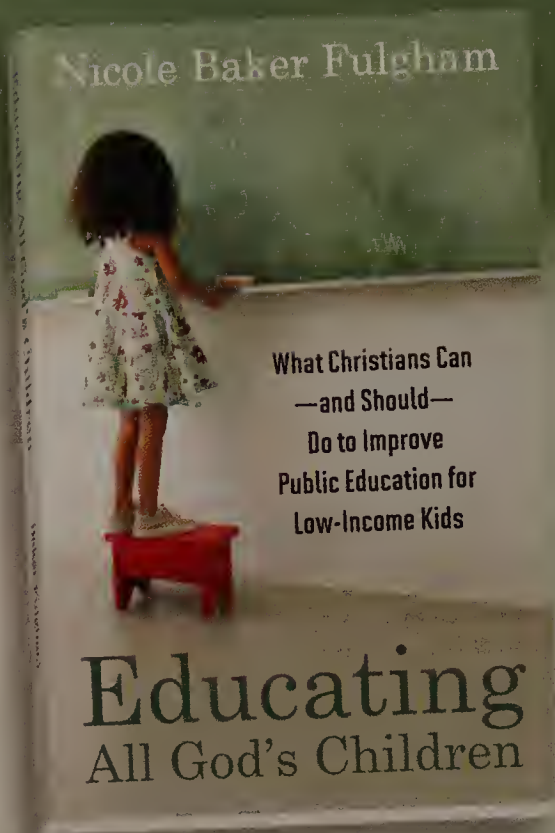
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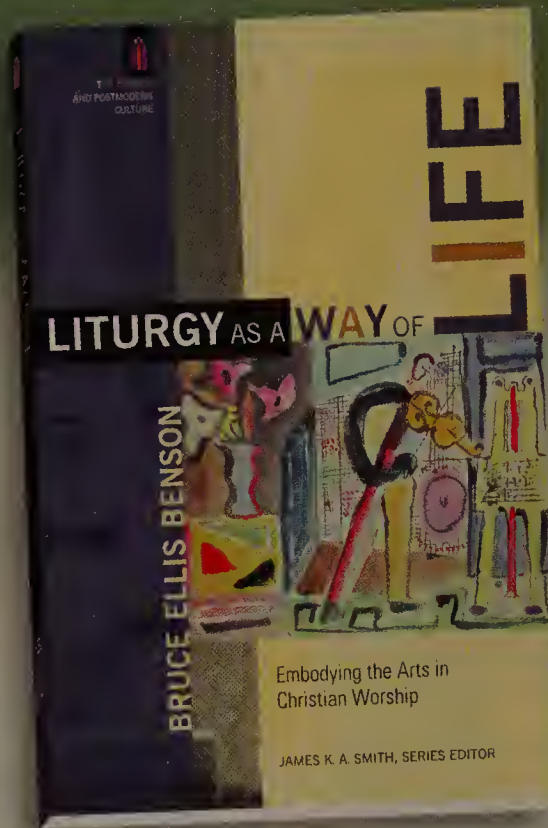


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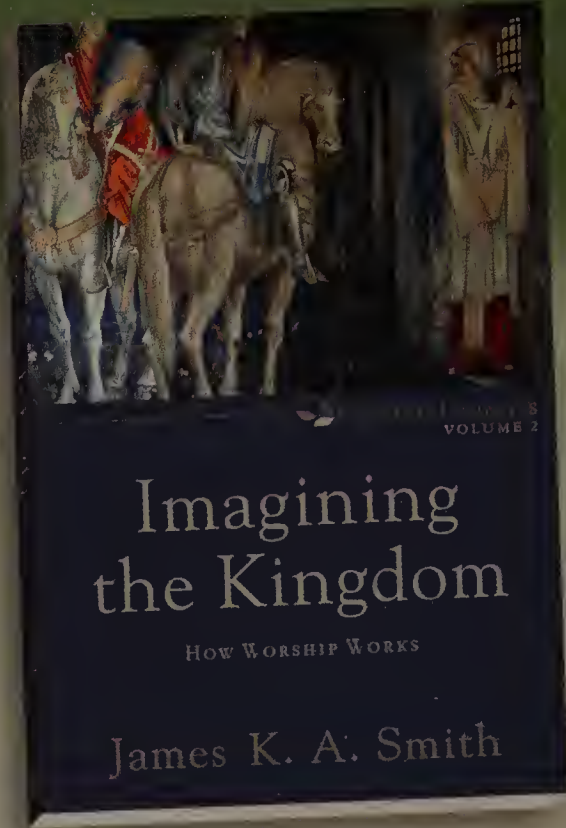
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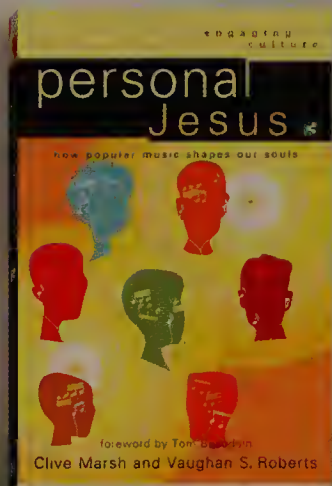
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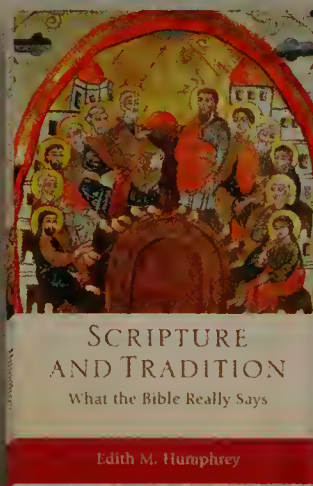


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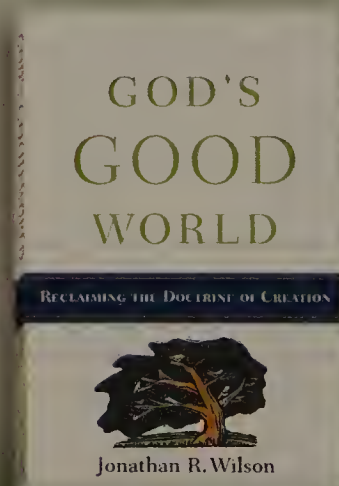
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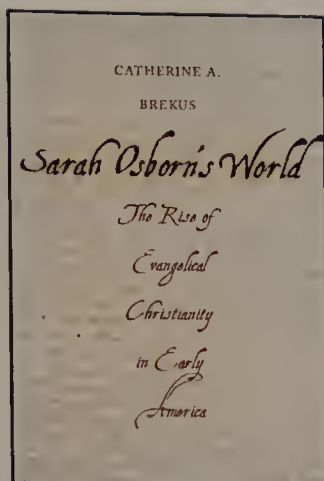
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## Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America

By Catherine A. Brekus  
Yale University Press, 448 pp., \$35.00



Catherine Brekus introduces us to a disturbing, heart-breaking and improbably inspiring life. Sarah Osborn's early years were an unending series of afflictions made worse by the austere Calvinism of her family and church. Born in England in 1714, Sarah emigrated to America with her parents, who settled in Rhode Island. Her parents emphasized her sinfulness to such an extent that she interpreted any misfortune as God's just punishment. When, at the age of eight, she stumbled into the fire and burned her right hand, she believed that God had chastised her for playing on the Sabbath.

Her parents did not spare the rod, and Sarah's extreme self-loathing and repressed anger at her parents nearly led her to take her own life. She then married a sailor against her parents' will and stole a considerable sum of money when they refused to give her a "marriage portion." Shortly after the birth of their first child, Sarah's husband died. Another marriage brought her some renewed stability, but her second husband promptly went bankrupt, and only Sarah's unstinting work ethic kept them from starvation. All her previous struggles seemed trivial, however, compared to the death of her only child, Samuel, at age 11.

Sarah lived through the decades in which New England Puritanism evolved into early evangelicalism, which was distinguished by an intense focus on individual conversion, a willingness to trust experiences of the heart as clear evidence of salvation, and a weakening of established religious authority. While reading the early chapters of *Sarah Osborn's World*, many readers will find themselves repulsed by certain aspects of late-Puritan Calvinism. As the values associated with the Enlightenment began circulating in New England, Calvinists redoubled their insistence that all events reflected God's will and that God had predestined individuals—

*Reviewed by John G. Turner, who teaches religious studies at George Mason University and is the author of Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet (Harvard University Press).*

including those who died in the womb or as infants—to either hell or heaven.

When her son died, Sarah was grief-stricken not just because of her earthly loss, but because her son had died without any sign of spiritual regeneration. Furthermore, Sarah blamed his death on her excessive love for him. God had brought her "to the greatest extremity, that I may know assuredly, the work of deliverance must be all his own." Given that Brekus informs readers that suicidal tendencies were unusually common among mid-18th-century evangelicals (a claim probably hard to prove), it would be easy to have disdain for Sarah's religion and to dismiss it as defective and destructive.

Sarah, however, did not remain mired in her misery and self-loathing, and her faith provided ballast and purpose to her life. In the midst of a period of depression that included thoughts of suicide, she sat in the galley of a church watching its members receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (participation followed church membership, which required a firm testimony of inward regeneration). Suddenly, she was overcome with a sense of Christ's suffering and her own sinfulness. "Oh," she later wrote, "how did my heart melt and my eyes flow with tears when I thought I saw my dearest Lord in his bitter agony in the garden." Employing the language of the Song of Solomon, she reveled in her Savior's love: "He appeared Lovely, the chiefest among ten thousands, was ten thousand times welcome to me."

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Sarah's conversion prepared her for a remarkable series of events. She quickly gained renown for her evangelistic dedication, but her influence peaked in the mid-1760s when her physical strength began to fail. Though she was only 50 years of age, her eyesight was failing, and she suffered from rheumatism. Nevertheless, she was a mighty instrument of revivalism. In 1764 slaves and free African Americans began coming to her Newport home every Sunday evening for prayer and Bible teaching. They wanted to learn how to read, and they wanted to hear Sarah explain the gospel. Soon Sarah's home was full nearly every night, with African Americans, Baptists, women and children coming on different evenings.

The meetings generated opposition on a number of levels. Slave owners and other whites feared any gathering of black people apart from their authority. Congregationalist ministers worried about any ecclesiastical association with Baptists. Men wondered about the propriety of a woman teaching men. Sarah mitigated the last objection by having her husband pray in front of the adult white men who came to her home. Nevertheless, when even her ministerial friends encouraged her to end her meetings, she refused. "Man can't determine me," she wrote in her diary. She meant that God, rather than any human beings, directed her path.

Sarah Osborn's meetings demonstrated the evangelical tendency to exalt religious experience—"experimental religion," it was termed—above other sources of authority. Although she

lacked any formal position of leadership, Sarah became the most powerful figure in Newport's First Church. When her congregation searched for a new minister in the late 1760s, candidates preached at her home. Her support eventually secured the position for Samuel Hopkins, who was renowned for both his abolitionism and his modifications of Jonathan Edwards's theology. After Hopkins moved to Newport, he often stopped at the Osborn residence on Saturdays to test out his ideas for the next day's sermon.

Brekus does more than recover the life of a once-famous woman. She also reappraises the relationship between the Enlightenment and evangelicalism. Eighteenth-century evangelicals presented themselves as implacable opponents of a host of values associated with the Enlightenment: optimism about human nature and agency, a benevolent view of God, humanitarianism and individualism. Brekus demonstrates, however, that evangelicals modified—and perhaps saved—their religion in accordance with Enlightenment impulses. They stopped seeing their love for family members as idolatry, they backed away from theological self-loathing, and they grew more confident in their ability to oppose earthly injustice.


American evangelicals, at the same time, exerted a positive influence on the early Enlightenment. At least for a time, they critiqued economic self-interest, and they cautioned against unrealistic expectations of human progress. Moreover, early

evangelicals sometimes valued the experiences of women, Native Americans and blacks in a way that most white, male Enlightenment thinkers did not.


In one of the most poignant scenes in *Sarah Osborn's World*, Sarah contemplates selling a slave named Bobey, whom she received as a gift. Sarah was a friend and spiritual mentor to Bobey's mother, Phillis, who had gained admittance as a full member to Newport's First Church. "She is made free indeed," Sarah wrote after seeing Phillis receive the Lord's Supper for the first time.

Phillis and Bobey were not free in this world, however. When Sarah decided to sell Bobey, Phillis upbraided her white friend. Sarah felt betrayed by Phillis, but she eventually concluded that a future master might imperil Bobey's salvation and chose not to sell her slave. Through the influence of Hopkins, Sarah later rejected the institution of slavery entirely.

In Brekus's account, the intersection of evangelicalism and the American Enlightenment produced a religion that discarded some of its most disturbing beliefs and became more able to both perceive and relieve human suffering.



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## The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia

By Rowan Williams  
Oxford University Press,  
168 pp., \$16.95



Who would have thought that a new book on C. S. Lewis could bring fresh, even revolutionary insight to perhaps the most overstudied Christian writer in the anglophone world? *The Lion's World* is such a book.

Countering Christian acolytes, who hail Lewis as the super-certain apologist, and Philip Pullman-like detractors, who damn Lewis as a poisonous racist, sexist and sadomasochist, Williams contends that there is a largely undiscovered Lewis to be found in his Narnia novels. Williams confesses that the Narnia books lack the rich mythography of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, that they contain bothersome inconsistencies and infelicities and that Aslan sometimes resembles a sword-wielding Crusader more than a crucified Lord. Even so, they furnish what Lewis's formal defenses of Christian faith often lack: a convincing encounter with the disruptive and subversive truthfulness that is God and God's world. They enable readers to experience the depth and difficulty of belief, to sense the complexity of human and divine realities that Lewis elsewhere turns into ghostly abstractions.

Williams never mentions the books on which Lewis's reputation as an apologist largely rests: *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*. For him, the best of Lewis is located in his fiction: *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *That Hideous Strength*, *Till We Have Faces*, but principally the Narnia books. This is not to say that Williams regards these more imaginative works as illustrations of Lewis's theological ideas. They are not easy allegories offering coded links between Aslan and the incarnation, or between his death and the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Instead, they are stories whose moral truth and religious insight

emerge from plot and character, from scene and tone and atmosphere.

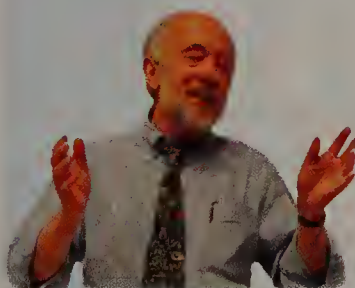
Neither is there any necessary congruence between Lewis's fiction and his apologetics. Lewis's single most infamous one-sentence theodicy is found in his claim that "pain is God's megaphone to arouse a deaf world." Suffering souls within my own small range of friendships have been so outraged at this endorsement of agony that they have vowed never to take Lewis seriously. Williams shows that Aslan refuses such glib assurances in Narnia. In a dream sequence in *The Silver Chair*, for instance, Jill asks for the Lion's permission to drink from a clear stream of water that divides them, but only if the noble beast will guarantee her safety. "I make no promises," Aslan answers.

Alarmed at this refusal, Jill desperately presses the Lion: "Do you eat girls?" In a response hardly meant to comfort children (or adults!), the creature flatly denies that suffering is meant for soul-making:

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

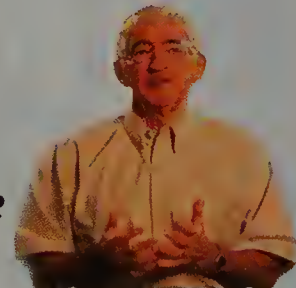
When Jill declares that she will then seek another river of

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*Reviewed by Ralph C. Wood, professor of theology and literature at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and the author of Chesterton: The Nightmare Goodness of God (Baylor University Press).*



life, the Lion responds with the same dispassionate objectivity: "There is no other stream." Unlike the brittle theodicy of *The Problem of Pain*, this is a clear confession of the claim made by Orual, the narrator-protagonist in *Till We Have Faces*: "The divine nature devours us merely for being what it is."

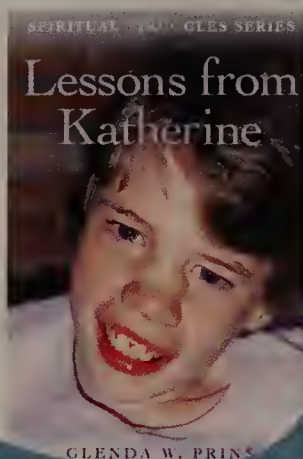
The genius of the Narnia chronicles, in Williams's estimate, may lie in Lewis's decision to embody his Christ-figure

not as a human but as an animal creature. It enables him to narrate the terrible risks entailed in God's making and remaking of the world. God works through secondary causes and probability-driven chances, Lewis hints, that do not spare even the most faithful, just as human action often produces unintended horrors of body and soul alike. "One thing Aslan cannot do is pretend he is not what and who he is," Williams writes.

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Under his scrutiny the likelihood is that we shall all feel as unsafe as it is possible to be. . . . He cannot be other than truth. And confronted with truth in this shape, there may be no promises, no rewards and no security. But there is nowhere else to go.

Clearly Williams's Lewis is not the hale and bluff *defensor fidei* derided by his Oxford enemies as "Heavy Lewis." It is a much more delightful and considerably less tidy Lewis. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan stages a Christmas party whose joyfulness outrages the White Witch, just as he also breathes life into creatures whom she had petrified. In *Prince Caspian*, Aslan's freedom is depicted as nothing less than riotous. There the god Bacchus and the drunken Silenus help celebrate a liberation "that extends from nature spirits to schoolchildren." It is the devils whose rigidly ordered world depends on suffocating orthodoxies and oppressive clichés. Nor is Lewis Platonic about sex. In both *That Hideous Strength* and *A Grief Observed*, he makes evident that "erotic satisfaction fully enjoyed is one of the most powerful glimpses we can have of what union with God is like."

Williams's most daring claim is that Narnia constitutes no layer-cake land of lower and higher things, no parallel realm of shadows and realities. It is Israel and the church, and thus the realm of grace: "the unplanned and uncontrolled incursion into our self-preoccupied lives of God's joy in himself." There we encounter the truth that disentangles "our most ingenious strategies for avoiding what we most want," the delight that dissolves our vaunted self-possession. Narnia is indeed "the Lion's World," appealing to those who think they have dismissed Christianity as well as to Christians who have domesticated their faith.

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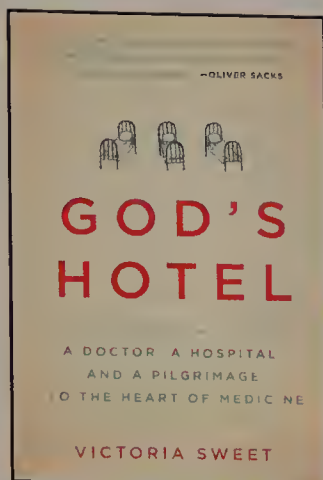
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## God's Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital, and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine

By Victoria Sweet

Riverhead, 432 pp., \$16.00 paperback



Laguna Honda sounds like a car, but it's a hospital. It's an almshouse in San Francisco, a place of refuge for several thousand people. It's the last such institution in America: not an homage to high-tech mechanized medicine, like every other hospital in the country, but more of a garden in which waifs and strays who can't go home because they have no home to go to, who can't be cared for in the community because they have no community, can instead be regenerated. It's a kind of New Orleans Superdome without the drama and urgency and horror but with the same slow-burning, mirror-to-the-nation pathos.

This unusual setting, an inheritor of the Hôtel-Dieu, in which the poor were cared for in medieval Europe, becomes in this absorbing book the stage for a fourfold pilgrimage. The volume is a study in patience with patients: author Victoria Sweet carefully explains the details of a series of memorable people who taught her and trained her as they opened her eyes and her soul to the nature of healing. It is a study in the hospitality of a hospital: every chapter tells of an ongoing (and often comic) battle between administrators, with their new schemes for counting, measuring, improving and evaluating, and the doctors, nurses and patients who continue to elude and evade the constraints of the bureaucrats while discovering what health is really about.

It is a study in the nature of medicine itself: unlike a book such as Ann Patchett's *State of Wonder*, which appears to be a critique of American medicine but remains too much in thrall to its subject, *God's Hotel* is not taken in by the sophistication of the awesome American medico-educational complex; instead it disarmingly offers imagination, practice and a complementary ethos.

It is, in the end, a personal pilgrimage: the author finds wisdom in her studies, in her visits to Europe, in walking the route to Santiago de Compostela, in remaining faithful to the hospital, its staff and its patients through sunshine and rain. All

four pilgrimages are interlaced throughout the book: they are not, finally, detachable from one another.

In a crucial passage, Sweet encounters a Mrs. Muller, who, it seems, is diabetic, demented and psychotic. On close inspection Mrs. Muller turns out to have a dislocated hip: her other conditions gradually and movingly evaporate as it becomes clear that they all had arisen in response to the poor treatment of the hip. Sweet calculates that her own practice of "slow medicine"—paying close attention to patients and letting them remain in the hospital rather than resorting to interventions and medications from the outset—had in this one case alone saved the health-care system about \$400,000. In exasperation she points out that in the pervading medical culture, "No expense was spared for medications, tests, and procedures, but to make up for that, staff, food, and accoutrements were cut to the bone." All these extremely expensive interventions are usually considered necessities, while doctors and nurses are considered a luxury. She estimates that slow medicine, by discontinuing perhaps ten or 12 unnecessary medications per person, is "more efficient than efficient healthcare by at least seventy dollars per day."

But the real focus of the book is above and beyond health-care budgets. Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings out of her treasure what is new and what is old. Sweet brings out of her treasure a continual array of gifts and insights about med-

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Review by Samuel Wells, vicar at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, and author most recently of *Learning to Dream Again: Rediscovering the Heart of God (Eerdmans)*.



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While the CENTURY is no longer publishing an end-of-year index of articles, the CENTURY website offers something more flexible and powerful: **searchable archives**. Each page includes a search bar in the upper right-hand corner. Search results can be sorted by title, author or date; they can also be filtered by keyword or subject area.

For example, maybe you recall reading an article that discusses creation in terms of all the “stuff” God made, but you can’t remember much more than that. So you **SEARCH** for “stuff.”

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It is conventional wisdom that ministers hate stewardship season and dislike talking about money.  
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**NEWS**  
**Former White House aide says Bush failed on "poor people stuff."**  
"The White House gets what the White House really wants."  
Mar 08, 2005  
A former deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives says President Bush has failed to support the program as he had promised.  
David Kuo, who left the position in December 2003, said the White House didn't push hard enough for Congress to deliver the \$8 billion Bush had promised to faith-based initiatives during his first year in office.  
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This pulls up a lot of results, so **SORT** them by date to see recent content first.

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**Living in a material world »**  
**God's good stuff**  
Jul 13, 2010 by Michael Lindvall  
As a pastor in New York City, I've found myself challenged to think more deeply about "stuff." I've come to believe that the truth about what we too casually name "materialism" is not so simple. It ought to be clear, after all, that God doesn't hate stuff. Witness the creation story. God *invents* stuff. At the end of each of six days, God engages in self-congratulation, pronouncing serial evening benedictions on the stuff created that day: "Good!"  
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- Books (1)
- Politics & Society (1)
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- consumerism (1)
- food (1)
- how my mind has changed (1)
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### SEARCH RESULTS

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icine and hopeful life that infuse her account with wisdom, challenge and encouragement.

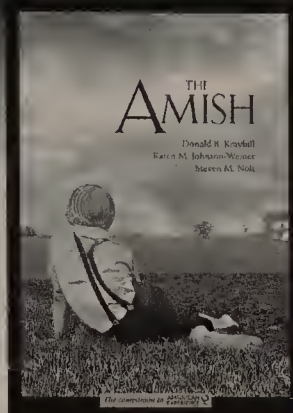
At the root of this wisdom lies the unlikely medieval figure of Hildegard of Bingen. Sweet notes there are two Hildegards in academic discourse: the theological woman of letters, and the medical infirmarian who knew a lot about the body you wouldn't expect a medieval nun to know. Sweet's academic project, against the grain of the field, is to synthesize the two.

The setting for this synthesis is a year in a Swiss hospital, where Sweet finds, astonishingly and symbolically, that the emergency room is comfortable, pleasant, congenial—and empty. This discovery epitomizes the revelation intended by the whole book and synthesizes the personal, medical, administrative and intellectual challenge Sweet's cumulative argument represents. The empty Swiss emergency room is a visual, unforgettable, undeniable and compelling critique of American medicine: for the crisis of American medicine is, without doubt, crystallized in its emergency rooms.

Sweet is a born teacher, and she loves nothing more than to dwell on the etymology of key words in medicine. It's time well spent. Thus, for example, she recalls that neither the Greeks nor the Romans had hospitals. The hospital tradition began with the medieval monastery, wherein caring for the sick poor and the ailing monks was the foremost Christian duty. Hence Western society's commitment not to give up on people simply because they can't contribute to its economic well-being. In Latin, *hospes* means both host and guest: the roles are interchangeable. For the monks (unlike the Romans), that wasn't because they were only in the business of caring for people of the same class; it was because, by the tradition of the parable of the last judgment, any guest could be Christ. In communicating this truth, Sweet realizes she hasn't been the host at Laguna Honda: she's been the guest.

This is a winsome, elegant, nuanced, engaging manifesto for a partnership between contemporary and more sane medical practice, delivered in narrative form. Occasionally Sweet trespasses into the studiously ironic self-referential quaintness of *This American Life*, but for the most part she practices what she preaches: close attention to the patient, careful employment of historic and alternative wisdom and combative challenges to the absurdities of bureaucratic nostrums that have little to do with either health or care. By remaining a pilgrim through Hildegard, medicine and life, Sweet avoids setting herself up as the fount of a new wisdom. Instead, she whets the appetite for a generation of physicians, nurses and—dare one hope?—administrators who will rediscover the roots of health and well-being in interdependent community, patient attention and complementary and collaborative methods of treatment.

In doing so, Sweet offers the church a model of witness. Hers is not a style of denunciation or campaign or protest or demand. Instead she combines research and practice; she sets out to learn before she proclaims; she realizes the answers may lie outside her own experience; she pays close regard to patients as the possible source of their own problems; she holds off from techniques and solutions until it's clear what their role might be; and she knows she's on a pilgrimage, which, like all pilgrimages, becomes a lesson not only in the destination but in the discoveries to be made on the way there.



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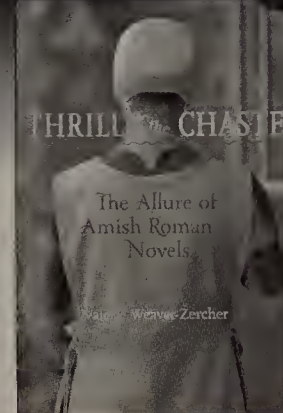
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## My Beloved World

By Sonia Sotomayor  
Knopf, 336 pp., \$27.95



Celebrity memoirs often appeal to readers' basest motives. They hope to discover some secret formula for success. Or they want to know whether the author took revenge on enemies or intimates. If the author is a public figure, readers are on the lookout for clues to an ideological bent or personal grievances that will make the author's future decisions predictable.

If you're expecting to find such revelations in the memoir of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, you will be disappointed.

If, however, you are intrigued by the question of how a little girl from the projects in the Bronx grew up to be one of the most influential people in the country, you will enjoy this narrative. And if you love to listen to a powerful story told with passion and compassion, simply yet lyrically, as though you were sitting across from the author in a café in New York City, you will turn each page of this book with pleasure.

Here are some of the essential facts of Sotomayor's life: Her doting father, Juan, was an alcoholic and died when she was nine years old. Her mother, Celina, escaped poverty in Puerto Rico by joining the Women's Army Corps during World War II. Both parents left some relatives behind when they moved to New York City from the island. The title of the book pays homage to the family's island roots through the words of the poet José Gautier Benítez: "I return to my beloved world, / In love with the land where I was born."

From birth, Sotomayor lived in two worlds, and she has straddled many others throughout her lifetime. At first she was considered a difficult child; she earned the nickname Ají, meaning hot pepper, because of her curiosity and exuberance. She was loved by both parents and especially by her paternal grandmother, whom she calls Abuelita.

The book opens dramatically as we meet eight-year-old Sonia, who has just been diagnosed with diabetes. From now on, her life will depend on injections of insulin. Her alcoholic father's trembling hands prevent him from being a reliable caretaker. Her mother, a nurse, needs to work outside the home so the family can survive. Her parents' arguments drive young Sonia to learn how to ignite the gas stove, sterilize the needle and inject the proper amount of insulin at the right time—by herself.

So the young girl with huge obstacles to health and well-being grows up early, tolerates and shepherds her younger brother, and carries her parents' sadness as a hidden burden. After her father's death, her mother barricades herself in the bedroom, and the psychological pressure becomes even harsher. Sonia finally screams at her mother, demanding that she pay attention to the family she has—her children—rather than succumb to depression over the sad ending to her marriage.

The Catholic Church played a significant role in Sonia's

advancement and that of her brother, Junior. They both graduated from Blessed Sacrament School and then Cardinal Spellman High School, thanks to the sacrifice of their mother, who believed that a Catholic education was the best way to ensure that her children would excel in life. Sotomayor concludes that as a whole Catholic education was good for her, but she reveres only one of her teachers. Most of them filled her with "more or less a continuous state of dread."

During her elementary school years, Sonia learned to love gold stars and asked the best student in the class to teach her how to get more of them. Thus she began a lifetime habit of seeking mentorship from anyone around her who seemed to know more than she did.

Reading Nancy Drew books and watching Perry Mason on TV first drew young Sonia into the world of law and the courts. Experience in the forensic club in high school taught her many skills of argumentation, including the necessity of appealing to emotion as well as reason.

Admission to Princeton was a turning point for Sonia. There she began to see and to compensate for deficiencies in her education. When a more privileged friend compared Sonia's experience at Princeton to that of Alice in Wonderland, Sonia's response was "Alice who?" Again, with the help of friends and mentors, Sonia plunged into a summer reading program that included classics she had missed in her home reading program based on *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

After Princeton, Sotomayor married her high school sweetheart, Kevin Noonan. She graduated from Yale Law School, then started her career as an assistant district attorney in New York. Soon thereafter her marriage ended—a story the author handles with great understanding and compassion, in the same way she treats her parents' marital strife.

By the time Sotomayor reaches her goal of becoming a U.S. District Court judge and then far exceeds any of her goals by being selected as a Supreme Court justice, her story loses some of its energy. Achievement is not as compelling to readers as obstacles attacked and overcome.

The genius of this book derives from its author's huge heart, magnanimous spirit and beautiful language. Serious difficulties never douse her joy. The memoir can best be described as a love song to every person the author has ever met. Since one of her strongest animating desires is to learn, she wrestles with every memory until she wrings a blessing out of it. She also uses imagery, verbs and occasional Spanish quotations with the fluidity of a poet.

Having received the benediction of her beloved Abuelita, who believed in both the older spiritualist traditions of the island she left and the rites and rituals of Catholicism in New York City, Sotomayor crafted her own theology of love and forgiveness. If this book predicts anything about her positions as a judge, it is this: she will look for ways to build bridges rather than walls between any two antagonists, whether they be relatives, friends, enemies or whole cultures.

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*Reviewed by Shirley Hershey Showalter, who is writing a memoir about growing up Mennonite in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. She blogs at [shirleyshowalter.com](http://shirleyshowalter.com).*





## 2013 WASHINGTON ISLAND FORUM with Brian McLaren June 24–28, 2013

# THE CHURCH THAT IS EMERGING

*Many sectors of the Christian church are retrenching. Christian leaders are feeling anxious and trying to figure out how to survive. Yet, many Christians are seeing the pressures of today as the birth pains for a new kind of Christian faith for tomorrow. What's emerging? What is trying to be born? That will be the focus of the 2013 forum—in terms of theology, spirituality, identity and organization.*

The Forum presenter will be **Brian McLaren**, prolific author on the changing nature of the church and leader of the emergent church movement who is known for his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*. His most recent book is *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road? Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World*.

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### Daily Themes (Tuesday–Friday)

**A New Kind of Christianity:** Ten questions are simmering on the back burner of our theological kitchen, and sometimes the pot boils over! What's cooking when we make space for a quest inspired by ten profound questions?

**Naked Spirituality:** If our churches don't produce people characterized by communion with God, Christlike character, and the fruit of the Spirit, people have every reason to ask why we stay in business. What might it look like if we specialized in helping "normal" people develop a deeper life with God?

**Christian Identity in a Multifaith World:** We know how to have a strong-hostile Christian identity, and we know how to have a nominal-tolerant Christian identity, but how can we develop a Christian identity that is both strong in its Christianity and benevolent to other faiths?

**On Institutions and Movements:** If we become wiser about the relationship between movements, institutions and communities, we can judge and fight people less, understand and collaborate with them more and maybe even get more goodness accomplished in the process. So what are the essentials of a theology of institutions and movements?

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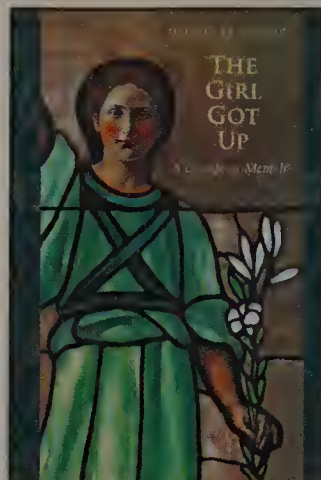
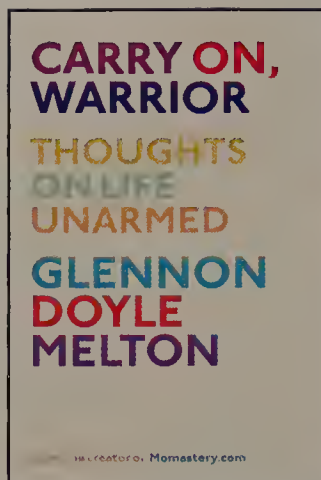


**Carry On, Warrior:  
Thoughts on Life Unarmed**

By Glennon Doyle Melton  
Scribner, 288 pp., \$25.00

**The Girl Got Up:  
A Cruciform Memoir**

By Rachel M. Srubas  
Liturgical Press, 152 pp., \$16.95  
paperback



Shortly after Glennon Melton was plucked from obscurity thanks to a series of enormously viral blog posts, Scribner beat out nine other major publishers in the bidding for her first book, *Carry On, Warrior*. Melton shared the press release on her Momastery blog with her trademark wit: noting the luminaries in the Scribner portfolio, she wrote, “I’ve heard that Hemingway started as a mommy blogger, too.”

In some ways Melton is a typical mommy blogger, plumbing the ordinary crucibles of parenting for material. One of her most popular posts—which, like many others, appears in the book relatively unaltered—takes on the older women who stop mothers of young children in public to remind them that the years pass quickly and to enjoy every moment. One day Melton receives such advice at a department store during a particularly trying moment:

[My daughter] was wearing a bra she had swiped from the cart and sucking a lollipop she undoubtedly found on the ground. She also had three shoplifted clip-on neon feathers found on the ground. She looked exactly like a contestant from *Toddlers and Tiaras*. A losing contestant.

She confesses that the older women’s well-meaning reminders make her feel rotten, because all she really wants is for the day to be over.

The typical mommy blogger leaves it there, letting the bracing honesty and self-deprecating humor suffice. But Melton pushes further, offering her readers pearls of spiritual wisdom. The “Don’t Carpe Diem” story ends with a lesson in *chronos* and *kairos* time. *Chronos* is “ten excruciating minutes in the Target line time, it’s four screaming minutes in time-out time, it’s two hours until Daddy gets home time.” Melton identifies *kairos* as the moments when she glimpses her daughter’s beauty or steps out of her impatience with a slow cashier to behold the abundance of her shopping cart full of good food. “Don’t Carpe Diem,” she writes, letting tired parents off the hook for not enjoying every moment. “Carpe a couple Kairoses a day.” Certainly, this rendering of time is nothing new to many Christians. But Melton serves as a translator, artfully setting this and other potentially heady spiritual concepts smack dab into family life, *Toddlers and Tiaras* references and all.

Melton explains herself in the introduction. Realizing that other people tended to look at her apparently pulled-together

family and deduce that they were, in fact, pulled together, she became tired of hiding behind pretense. She dared tell the truth about herself to a new friend at the park: she was a recovering bulimic and sober alcoholic with a police record, rage issues and a lingering case of postpartum depression. The friend eagerly reciprocated Melton’s risk, divulging her own heavy burdens. At the time, Melton’s family was trying to

adopt a child. Her police record slammed that door and also disqualified her from volunteering at a nursing home.

The playground connection sparked a new sense of vocation for Melton:

Maybe my public service could be to tell people the truth about my insides because it seemed to make people feel better, for whatever reason. . . . I considered that maybe the gifts God gave me were storytelling and shamelessness.

Days after Melton decided that she was called to “make people feel better about their insides by showing them mine,” her pastor invited her to tell her story at church. It went swimmingly, of course. She thought, “Okay then. Take that, nursing home. I didn’t want to serve your stupid lemonade anyway. Does one get standing ovations and tears of joy for serving lemonade? I think not.”

Melton’s personality is strong, and her writing is probably not for everyone. Yet even if her dramatics and occasionally overdone humor start to grate, it’s awfully hard not to be moved by her faithful recklessness. During the painful saga of the failed adoption attempts, Melton heard what one might call a still, small voice. The voice asked, “Now what do you want more? Do you really want to help my orphans, or do you really want an adopted child? There might be a difference.” Melton and her husband (from whom she separated last fall) donated the lion’s share of their savings to an orphanage in Guatemala.

*Carry On, Warrior* is precisely the kind of book I hope the parents in my congregation will read. Melton is a richly gifted storyteller, and her shamelessness is the best kind, rooted in a refusal to believe that she is anything other than a forgiven and beloved child of God.

*The Girl Got Up: A Cruciform Memoir*, by Rachel M. Srubas, is an entirely different kind of book. Whereas Melton is populist and popular, Srubas is esoteric and published by a press run by the Order of Saint Benedict. Whereas Melton’s progressive Christian faith tends toward the generalities of 12-step spirituality, Srubas’s memoir is saturated with biblical allusion. And whereas Melton is not a master wordsmith, Srubas

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*Reviewed by Katherine Willis Pershey, associate pastor at First Congregational Church of Western Springs, Illinois, and author of Any Day a Beautiful Change: A Story of Faith and Family.*



crafts prose so poetic it scarcely surprises the reader when she weaves original poems into the narrative. But like Melton, Srubas has the God-given gifts of shamelessness and storytelling, par excellence.

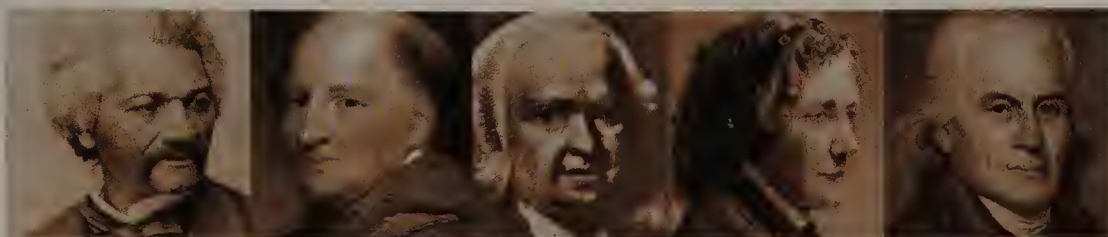
A Presbyterian clergywoman and Benedictine oblate, Srubas explains her project:

I write and publish stories about myself in which sex, drugs, and family secrets figure. It's unseemly. I hereby sacrifice any image of seemliness I might have once wished to project. . . . If this memoir is truly to be cruciform, I must sacrifice the fantasy popular among Christians that the new life in Christ may be attained without suffering and death.

She likens herself to the girl who was not dead but sleeping, to whom Jesus went and extended a hand. As the girl got up, so too did Srubas, at 22, when she converted to Christianity from atheism and a traumatic early life. I expected her conversion to be as exciting as the escapades that preceded it. It was not. Srubas simply sat in her nice Presbyterian boyfriend's blue chair and prayed, unexpectedly but with great sincerity. After she prayed—a prayer of lamentation, surrender and, above all, devotion—she all but dashed to the nearest Presbyterian church.

The cruciform motif, with its agonizing insistence that the tomb cannot be emptied before it is filled, makes for a harrowing journey toward redemption. The book is at times almost unbearably dark, but Srubas is a brave narrator. "Some writers, like some psalmists, are meant to lament, to allow readers into their tenebrous rooms. Fear not. The darkness will not overcome you." And it does not; the light comes, brilliant and redemptive, and it seems all the brighter for the shadows (and strange beds, and a mental institution) where Srubas suffered. The cruciform shape also underlies the profound purpose of Srubas's work. She allows that her vulnerability may well be a source of healing for readers, but unlike Melton, whose goal is to make other people feel better, Srubas grasps that crucifixion and resurrection are ultimately about glorifying God.

Though it is every bit as deserving, *The Girl Got Up* will not make it onto nearly as many nightstands as *Carry On, Warrior*. It isn't the kind of writing that goes viral, but it will benefit from word-of-mouth advertising. Dog-eared copies will be passed from friend to friend, along with the imperative: *Read this*. Srubas achieved her aim of writing a "cruciform memoir" so successfully that one knows the gist of it if one has heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and has uttered the mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.



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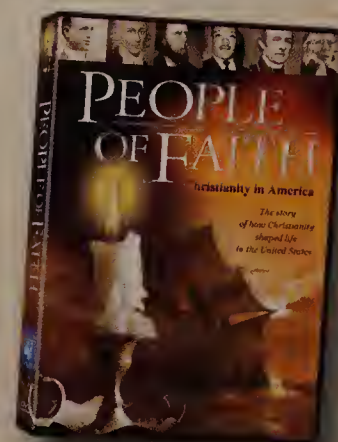
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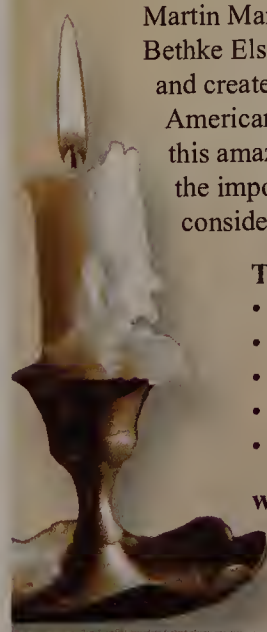
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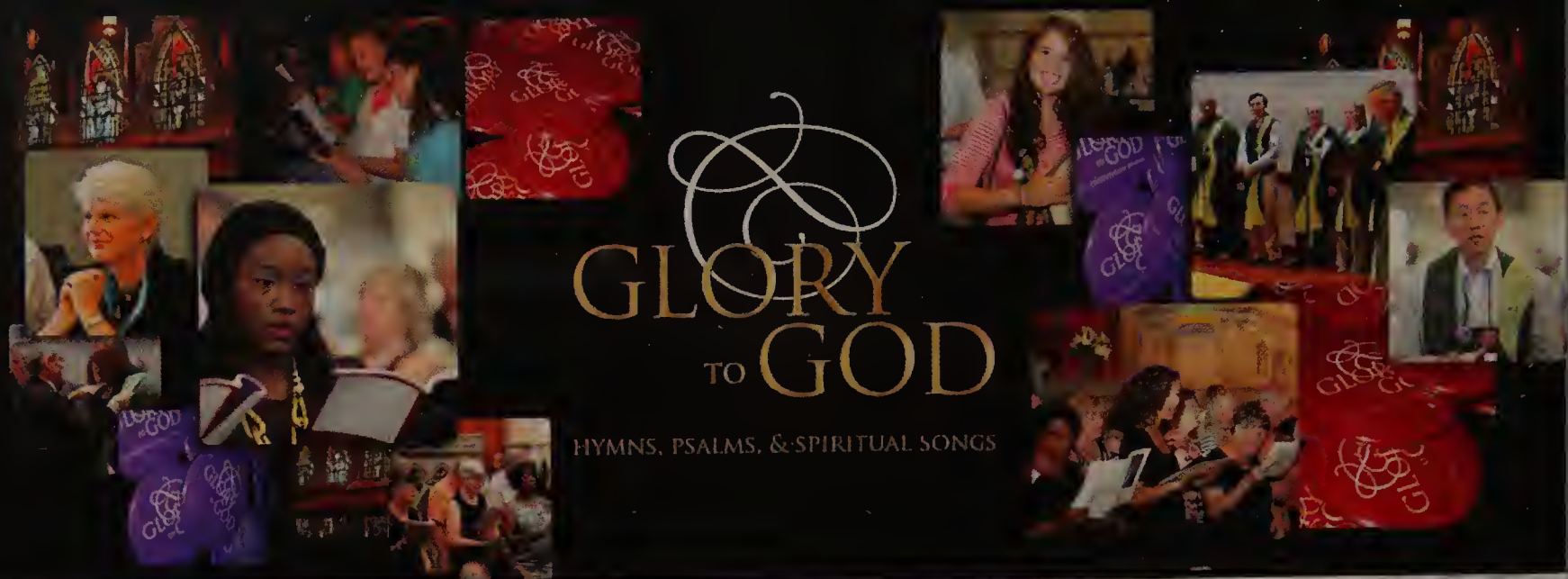
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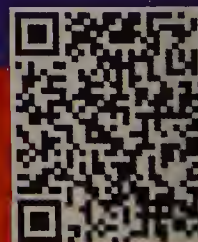
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# Faith MATTERS

by M. Craig Barnes

## The rest of the story

**THE CONGREGATION** was aging, losing members and worried about its future. In some ways it was the poster congregation for what we mean when we refer to the declining mainline church. It was also the first congregation I served as a pastor.

It was a hard church to figure out because most of the members were Norwegian and not particularly fond of discussing their feelings. During the years I spent there we shared good and bad times, experienced some growth and became much more involved in mission. It had little to do with me and everything to do with whatever it was within the souls of people who were determined, in their quiet way, to be the church.

I left that congregation more than 20 years ago. But recently I received my best glimpse of the unrecognized gift that explains why that church, and many like it, will remain too busy with mission to die.

Scottie was a five-year-old cherished son of that church. I remember him bouncing around Sunday school with his older brother and twirling on his father's hand while being led through the church parking lot. His naturally large eyes looked even bigger behind thick glasses that gave him the appearance of being always surprised.

Scottie's parents joined the congregation because they wanted their sons baptized. Since the congregation was struggling to attract young families, we may have overwelcomed this family. Soon they were very involved, and happily settled into the life of the church.

Over the years, though, it became clear that something was amiss with the mother of this family. At first she missed meetings, and then we began to see her husband and the boys in worship without her. When she did come she was disheveled and inattentive.

When her husband made an appointment to see me, he plunged immediately into the deep waters. "She drinks so much. I can't make her stop." He went on to describe the horrible arguments, the days he would come home from work to find her passed out when she was supposed to be watching the boys, the bottles hidden around the house, and her repeated fender benders. I was overwhelmed by the private hell this family had been enduring under the church's radar and silently cursed myself for missing the signs. When I inquired about treatment options, he threw up his hands and said, "Don't think I haven't tried. That's how the worst fights start."

Soon after our meeting he received a phone call at work

from the police department telling him that his wife had almost burned the house down. That was enough to get her to enter a residential treatment facility, and then there were other visits after that first one. Still the drinking continued. Finally, the husband had no choice but to leave and take the young boys with him.

That's about the time I accepted the call to go to another church. One of the hardest things about leaving a congregation is walking away from stories that are left raggedy and unfinished. Over the years I lost touch with this family as my heart became crowded with the dramas of other lives. But there were times when I wondered.

A month ago I received an e-mail from the current pastor of this church. He wanted to be sure that I knew that Scott was in his second year at the seminary I recently began to serve. I was startled, and within minutes I was on the phone asking Scott to come see me.

The look of surprise in Scott's eyes is long gone. Today his countenance is that of a young man who has already seen too much but who has also found that holy "something else" that appears when we think all is lost.

He updated me on his family and their experiences with the church. Eventually Scott's parents divorced, his father lost his job and their new house, and his mother drank herself into an almost vegetative state that left her permanently in a nursing home.

Good pastors followed me at their church to stand beside them in all of these deep waters. And the congregation rallied to offer babysitting, covered dishes, friendship to both of Scott's parents and many prayers. The boys were given star roles in the Christmas pageants, found their best friends in the youth group and went on mission trips. Everyone knew the family's problems but there was never a word of judgment or even pity. They were just being the church—the holy something else called grace.

When I asked Scott about his sense of call, he said it was pretty simple—he's never been able to get over the love of a congregation that kept showing up at his door year after year when there was only heartache on the other side. "Now," he said, "It's my turn."

We read so much analysis about the church being self-absorbed with its demise. But there are also these stories of congregations quietly being the body of Christ.

---

*M. Craig Barnes is president of Princeton Theological Seminary.*





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# ON Media

## Mad desires

**A**voyeuristic pleasure in historical flashbacks is part of what makes *Mad Men* compelling viewing. Set in the early 1960s, AMC's Emmy-winning drama about an advertising firm shows a world very close to our own except for being more glamorous (the characters make midday drinking look sophisticated instead of desperate, and they wear linen suits to the birthday party of an eight-year-old).

And except, of course, for all the casual racism, sexism and classism. A new secretary at the firm is subjected to nonstop verbal harassment and a public pool is started to see who will be first to sleep with her; a housewife drinks and smokes her way through her pregnancy; a picnicking family shakes their litter onto the verdant grass and drives away. How sexist and ignorant and environmentally unsound, we say from the safety of our couches.

"When are things going to get back to normal?" wonders Roger Sterling (John Slattery), the jocular senior partner at Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce, the fictional advertising company. He is responding to the firm's decision to hire its first African-American secretary in 1966. Given that viewers first met Roger five seasons earlier when he was trying to find a Jewish employee and pass him off as a junior creative agent to impress a Jewish client ("I had to go all the way to the mailroom," Roger brags, "but I found one"), SCDP has come a long way. And we know that 1966 is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to social and cultural revolutions.

Six seasons into *Mad Men*, I find myself watching the show not to revel in historical difference but to scour it for signs of how revolutionary change hap-

pens. What internal and external forces have to align for social change as profound as the civil rights and women's movements to take root? What transpires to turn Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss), the maligned secretary, into a sought-after creative force in her own right? Can we find clues in the *Mad Men* universe to finish these revolutions in our own time or to start others?

Season six, which premiered in April, brings the show that much closer to the cultural watershed of 1968. Roger will have an answer to his question: there is no going back to "normal" as he knows it. But that doesn't mean the revolution is complete.

Whatever useable insights the show might offer come in its portrayal not of big historical movements but of the inner lives of its finely drawn characters, whose desire, fantasy, imagination and nostalgia combine to aid in the birth of a new world—or to prevent it. This is true of no character as much as Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the central protagonist, a man who has reinvented himself many times.

As a young man in the Korean War, Draper steals the identity of his dead commander. When his first wife discovers his subterfuge and their marriage implodes, he reinvents himself as a single man oscillating between drunken black-outs and self-expression journaling, only to end up trying his hand at modern marriage with a career-minded younger wife. Draper is the enigma at the center of the show: what fundamentally motivates him is always shifting just out of view. As we watch him spiral between elation at new social possibilities and despair at a hard-to-name malaise that permeates the shifting world he occupies, he offers us the key to his own interpretation: you





**SELLING THE WORLD:** *Madison Avenue* ad executive Don Draper (played by Jon Hamm) is the central enigma of *Mad Men*.

have to be able to imagine the new world before you can desire it and you have to desire it before you can live in it.

As the chief creative executive in an advertising firm, Draper is in the business of tapping into human desire. Or as he says in season four: he doesn't just want to give people what they want, he wants to cultivate new desire. Of course, he is talking about selling face cream. But what he is really selling, if you take him at his word, is desire itself and the ability to imagine oneself in the world one wants to inhabit.

The show grasps something that Christians have known for a long time: if you cannot change the heart, external change will take you only so far. We must desire God's kingdom in order to inhabit it, and we must imagine it in the stories our tradition tells if we are to desire it. Unlike Draper's advertising visions, however, which are about constant reinvention focused on a yet-to-come future, Christian desire is formed in a strange paradox that holds the past and the future together. We never simply re-

invent ourselves but are offered old stories that remake us in new ways.

Part of our challenge today is imagining a world that counters the one that the Don Drapers helped create. There is nothing new or exciting about realizing how deeply the forces of consumer capitalism shape our desires. But watching these characters try to find the stories that help them live in this brave new world may give us insight into how to tell our own stories more compellingly and to advance a revolution that doesn't need an ad campaign to verify its truth.

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*Reviewed by Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham.*



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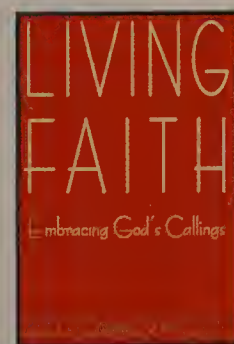
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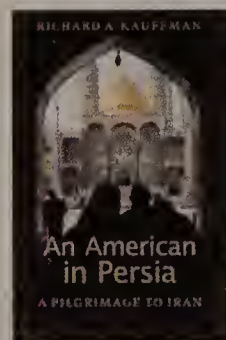
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# NOTES FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

"What happens when you look at Christianity outside its Euro-American framework?"

That question becomes pressing when we look at numerical changes in the churches today—when, for instance, we realize that Africa will soon be home to the largest population of Christian believers on the planet.

Though I describe my area of study as Global Christianity, that's a flawed phrase: if it's not global, is it really Christianity?"



Philip Jenkins's book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* is a landmark book for understanding contemporary global history. *Publishers Weekly* called it "a clarion call for anyone interested in the future of Christianity."

Philip Jenkins writes *Notes from the Global Church* for the *Christian Century*.

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by Rodney Clapp

# American SOUNDINGS

## Back to centered

Over the years, the Episcopal church I belong to has experimented (if that is the right word) with any number of spiritual practices. We've gone through phases exploring the Enneagram, the Myers-Briggs personality inventory and various spiritual gifts inventories. But one constant has been the practice of contemplative or centering prayer.

For well over a decade, members of the Julian Meeting have gathered one Sunday evening each month to sit and center together. Two leaders of the group, who have published books on contemplative prayer, have led Sunday school classes on

(crossing your legs will lead to discomfort and distraction). Then "center" and simply open yourself to God. There is no real agenda. This isn't about getting something from God or about self-improvement. It isn't about changing the world or your spouse or overcoming an enmity, at least not directly. It is about "merely" being, and being with God, for 15 or 20 minutes. (Can you stand it?)

Of course, in the silence you will be greeted immediately and tenaciously by distracting thoughts. Details of work, errands that need at-

When my mind incessantly won't quiet, I mentally repeat the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner").

A friend of mine centers with two sentences from Teresa of Ávila. "A whole lifetime is short. I cannot depend on things that pass away," she prays. And: "God is willing to wait for me for many days and many years." Sometimes she sings these phrases to hymn tunes.

I know a spiritual director who uses a phrase to break down contemplation into stages. She begins with the

was called to the priesthood, was engaged in centering prayer when she saw a series of musical notes building, bar by bar. In this she found assurance that God was building on what had come before in her life and leading to something more.

Another friend uses mental imagery to ease the distractions that come to mind while praying. He pictures leaves blowing in a yard. He does not try to grasp at or rake up all these leaves but briefly notes each one, then lets it go.

In my own centering, I picture my whole body like a clenched fist when I am clinging to anxieties or resentments. Letting go of these requires unclenching the fist and opening my hands, figuratively releasing my worries. Contemplative prayer is the ultimate relaxation—letting go and letting God, as they say.

This is not to say that contemplative prayer is a technique. It is the least instrumental of all spiritual practices. In centering we do not concentrate on what God can do for us. We concentrate simply on God and God's presence. God is not one of the details of our harried and overdetailed lives; God is finally and only the All. Let be.

## Contemplative prayer is about "merely" being with God.

the subject. I have learned what I know of contemplative prayer from them, along with books and my own halting attempts at centering. These leaders assure me not to worry that my attempts are halting. There are no experts at centering prayer, they insist.

One of the attractions of contemplative prayer in our complicated age is its simplicity. No tools or accoutrements are required. You merely need silence. Turn off the TV and the radio and back away from the computer. Sit quietly in a straight-backed chair, with both feet on the floor

tending, worries about friends and family (and self) will clamor for attention. One isn't supposed to fight these thoughts—that will only make them more tenacious. One writer on centering prayer suggests keeping a notepad at hand and jotting down tasks that come to mind—then letting them go. Richard Foster suggests offering worries and distractions up to God with palms down on each leg, then turning palms up to accept God's love and reassurance.

It's essential to have a centering word or phrase that will help you return to silence. My phrase is "Let be."

entire phrase, "Be still and know that I am God." Then she shortens it a bit at a time—first to "Be still and know that I am," then to "Be still and know," then "Be still" and finally simply to "Be."

Part of the practice of contemplation is taking time and space to hear the voice of God and to sort that out from the many distractions that present themselves. Contemplative prayers often find images coming to mind and in these they see or hear God. One friend, in the process of discerning whether or not she

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*Rodney Clapp's Soundings column appears in every other issue.*



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**WORSHIP LEADER/ASSOCIATE PASTOR** job posting for the American Protestant Church of The Hague, The Netherlands. Please apply under Associate Pastor Vacancy tab at [www.apch.nl](http://www.apch.nl).

First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor is looking for an **ASSOCIATE PASTOR** to complement our rich history by advancing our mission and outreach, leading adult education programs, and mentoring our resident ministers. We seek someone with strong biblical knowledge as well as diverse perspectives and excellent communications skills to fulfill the vital components of this position. See our website, <http://firstpresbyterian.org>, for more information and our CIF. E-mail your PIF to: [dickrigherink@gmail.com](mailto:dickrigherink@gmail.com).

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC AND THE ARTS**—Plymouth Congregational UCC is a growing, progressive, open and affirming congregation in Fort Collins, CO, adjacent to the campus of Colorado State University. Competitive salary, generous benefits. Music from traditional hymnody to Iona and Taizé. Our new director will be organist and choir director for 60-voice chancel choir, children's and bell choirs and be a team player in staff ministry. See more at: [www.plymouthucc.org](http://www.plymouthucc.org).

### Wellesley Congregational (Village) Church Wellesley, Massachusetts United Church of Christ (UCC) The Rev. Martin B. Copenhaver, Senior Pastor

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- Our Village Church enjoys over 1,000 members
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- Committed to ministries of service and outreach
- Active, intergenerational congregation
- An Open and Affirming church

Candidate must hold an M.Div. degree, be ordained in the UCC, possess at least two years of experience in parish ministry, with some experience in pastoral care.

Visit our website for application materials:  
[www.wellesleyvillagechurch.org/about-us](http://www.wellesleyvillagechurch.org/about-us)

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